

Symbiotic or Destructive?

An Analysis of the Metaphors About Journalism in American Films During the 1990s

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School

University of Missouri-Columbia

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree

Master of Arts

By Andrew C. Jenkins

Dr. Andrea Heiss, Thesis Supervisor

May 2019

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis titled

Symbiotic or Destructive?

An Analysis of the Metaphors About Journalism in American Films During the 1990s

Presented by Andrew C. Jenkins

A candidate for the degree of Master of Arts

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Andrea Heiss

Professor Clyde Bentley

Professor Amanda Hinnant

Professor Joanna Hearne

Acknowledgements

If patience is a virtue, the members of my thesis committee—Andrea Heiss, Clyde Bentley, Amanda Hinnant, and Joanna Hearne—should be candidates for sainthood.

They were extremely understanding of this chronic procrastinator.

Although it might sound trite, I want to sincerely thank my family and my Savior, Jesus Christ, because without him, I am nothing.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract.....	v
Chapter	
1. Review of Literature	1
Film theory and study.....	4
Mass media theory and study.....	6
Metaphor usage.....	7
Journalism film critique.....	8
2. Methodology.....	11
Theoretical framework	11
Methods	13
Summary.....	18
3. Findings.....	19
Journalism as a sport	19
Journalism as violent warfare	30
<i>Natural Born Killers</i>	32
Tamer metaphors.....	37
Inventing wars	45
Heroes and antiheroes.....	49
Journalism as carnal impulse or an exercise of the senses	54
Journalism as commodity or entertainment.....	63
Digging up dirt	63

Foodstuffs.....	65
Tangibility of journalism	68
People as a commodity	74
Movies, TV shows and books	76
Journalism as subhuman or superhuman endeavor.....	82
4. Analysis.....	92
A binary approach to journalism.....	92
Words—and images—as weapons.....	95
The human element.....	97
Ringmasters of the spectacle.....	98
Lions and demons	100
Stereotypes of journalists.....	101
Gender stereotypes	101
Fabricators of news and selfish opportunists	106
Whistleblowers and selfless truth-seekers	107
Summary.....	109
5. Conclusion.....	112
Examining other decades.....	112
The need for quantitative research	114
Limitations of metaphor analyses	115
Metaphors in other professions.....	116
Bibliography	117

Abstract

Whereas several studies have focused on the stereotypical representations that appear in mass media messages created by journalists, the aim of this thesis is the analysis of the representation of journalists in selected films. I examined 12 films and focused on the metaphors expressed in these films using the social cognition approach. These films include *Hero* (1992), *The Pelican Brief* (1993), *I Love Trouble* (1994), *Natural Born Killers* (1994), *The Paper* (1994), *To Die For* (1995), *Up Close and Personal* (1996), *Mad City* (1997), *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997), *Wag the Dog* (1998), *The Insider* (1999), and *True Crime* (1999). The study sought to uncover how metaphors in the films described individuals in the journalism field and whether the stereotypical images suggested by the metaphors were overall constructive or destructive to the institution of journalism.

The findings revealed five overarching themes of the films' metaphors: journalism as a sport, journalism as violent warfare, journalism as carnal impulse or an exercise of the senses, journalism as commodity or entertainment, and journalism as subhuman or superhuman endeavor. Many of the stereotypes evoked by the metaphors in the films portrayed journalists as exploitative and cold-hearted sensationalists. Some metaphors, though, did express a humanity, however imperfect, in journalists that often is lacking in film portrayals.

Chapter 1

Review of Literature

Much attention is devoted to studying stereotypes that professionals in the news media field use to describe members of particular groups, such as ethnic groups and women. Whether intentional or unintentional, perceived stereotypes appear in messages created by journalists (Lasorsa & Dai, 2007; Len-Rios, Rodgers, Thorson & Yoon, 2005). Stereotypes can be defined simply as any “category-based cognitive response to another person” (Fiske, 1993, p. 623). Stereotypes, which often compartmentalize entire groups of people into oversimplified and disparaging molds, can shape the way social groups are framed in messages created by news media.

Stereotypes are not limited to the people discussed in messages created by journalists, though. Journalists themselves can be on the receiving end of stereotypical representations. One medium in which journalists—as well as many other social groups—are often stereotyped is film, which has a long history of portraying journalists since the early years of Hollywood. A common image of the journalist perpetuated by films is the steady drinker whose primary goal is to get the scoop on sensational news without any regard to whom is harmed in the process (Ehrlich, 1997). Metaphors used in films to describe journalists are often ripe with similar stereotypical images that have accompanied people’s perceptions of journalists for many years. Metaphors in film that specifically describe journalists—especially those that are creative, unique or out-of-the-ordinary, as opposed to stale and overused ones—can point to widespread and negative perceptions of journalists in society.

In a linguistic sense, a metaphor is “traditionally defined as an implied comparison between two dissimilar objects, such that the comparison results in aspects that normally apply to one object being transferred or carried over to the second object” (Sopory & Dillard, 2002, p. 382). In a broader sense, the “essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2005, p. 104). An example of a commonly used metaphor can be found in the sentence, “The other team is going to kill us.” Of course, the statement doesn’t literally mean that a rival sports team is going to take the lives of its opponents. Instead, the statement links the concepts of violence and dominance through the word “kill” with a sporting event. The sentence is understood to mean that the other team is going to win the game easily by a large margin. Using the word “kill” to refer to a sporting event gives the impression that the match is closer to war than a friendly rivalry.

The social cognition approach describes stereotypes as belief systems that characterize various social groups (Dixon, 2000). Social cognition itself is described by Padilla and Perez (2003) as “a metatheoretical approach to studying social behavior. Its metatheoretical focus is on the mental processes that guide social interaction” (p. 41). In other words, the approach is concerned with the way people think about others. Stereotypes can have a significant impact on the way people think about others from different social groups because the stereotypes can affect how people process information. Consequently, mass media messages—such as those in movies—that contain stereotypes about journalists can shape the public’s overall perception about people in the journalism field.

Analyzing metaphors about journalists that are contained within films can provide a deeper understanding of how stereotypes are indirectly propagated over time. Through metaphors, stereotypes seem to be more indirectly implied. This is because by their very definition, metaphors are figurative rather than literal, and thus they exemplify a more abstract than direct relationship between objects and ideas. An analysis of metaphors in journalism-related films can also reveal possible changes in public perception about journalists. Whether the public's perceptions are swayed by films' messages or films' messages echo existing public sentiment, research on the metaphors in film can illuminate perceptions of journalists through history.

Additionally, analysis of metaphors in film can suggest possible reasons for the so-called "death of American newspapers" (Weeks, 2009). The negative stereotypical representations of journalists on film could dissuade those interested in entering the journalism field from doing so. Paradoxically, mass media messages that the would-be journalists might have hoped to one day help create could be the very roadblock that discourages them from pursuing entry into the field. Without finding new journalists to reinvigorate the field, how can the U.S. avoid the supposed "demise of American newspapers" (Weeks)?

The purpose of this study is to determine how metaphors were used in films in the 1990s to describe journalists and the process of journalism. A metaphor analysis will be applied to the key journalism-related films of the 1990s detailed in Ehrlich's comprehensive book on the subject, *Journalism in the Movies* (2006). Metaphor analysis will add another layer to the research and understanding of journalism's relationship with film. This study also seeks to provide greater insight into how the public might have

perceived the journalism field and those who were a part of it in the 1990s. Traditional journalism had reached a precipice in the 1990s that it couldn't turn back from. With the global permeation of the Internet and other technologies that led to a growing impersonality within journalism as well as other professions, with the culture wars in full swing during the decade, and with women's increasing entry into the workforce and their seeking equal treatment and status, journalism was fundamentally transformed. This makes the 1990s a worthwhile decade to examine.

The topics of film theory and study, mass media theory and study, metaphor usage and journalism film critique will be discussed in the following literature review.

Film theory and study

Film theory has nearly as long and varied a history as films themselves. Since the creation of motion pictures around the turn of the 20th century, there have been scholars who have debated about how to best understand and talk about films. Hudlin (1979) notes that one popular method of analyzing films is through regarding films as similar to literature, both of which have a language that can be "read." The dominant school of thought in the past, the Russian formalists, suggested that words in literature were akin to images in film. Poets and novelists used letters to compose messages on paper, whereas directors composed messages through frames and shots on celluloid. Hudlin, however, argues that the distinct differences between film, which is a more visual medium, and literature, which is a more verbal medium, make it difficult to transfer literature theories to the realm of film. It is pertinent to note that he says there is a substantial difference between depiction and portrayal in visual arts. Hudlin sums up the difference in this manner:

Da Vinci created a painting which depicts a smiling woman; the title of the painting informs us that the woman portrayed is Mona Lisa. Thus, what is *depicted* is understood by looking at the painting; what is *portrayed*, however, need not be a feature exhibited by the work. (pp. 49-50)

It seems the visual portrayal can readily be changed without altering the depiction, which can remain the same. A new title or new dialogue that is dubbed in can completely change what is portrayed on film, but all the while the actual depiction of images is unchanged. Literature, on the other hand, doesn't include a distinction between depiction and portrayal because they are both conveyed by words. When one wishes a portrayal in literature to be altered, the depiction consequentially is as well because the words themselves must be revised.

Despite Hudlin's strong argument that literature and film should not be treated analogously and that treating film as a language of signs and symbols is problematic—a position also taken by Pryluck (1975)—metaphor analysis of films still can be a valuable research pursuit. Even though a film interpretation or analysis might hinge more directly on what is visually depicted (which is generally static) because the dialogue, title or other words that accompany a film can be altered easily, the metaphors within a film are ultimately what made it into the final cut, and the stereotypical images they might support are spread around the world through the distribution process of that film. Film is a highly visual medium, but words also carry weight and express meanings that shouldn't be ignored. Where literary models of examining film might fall short, the social cognition approach can span the divide between film and language and instead focus on the

stereotypical images that are perpetuated through visual and verbal depictions of people in the journalism field.

Mass media theory and study

Stereotypes are an unfortunate reality in some journalistic writing. Stereotypical language can be prevalent and quickly consumed because it is easier for people to recall a blanket judgment about a group when presented with differing or conflicting information than to thoughtfully consider and evaluate new messages (Lasorsa & Dai, 2007).

Whereas stereotypes are generally viewed as a misuse of language, though, the use of metaphors is often promoted in journalistic writing because the figures of speech can successfully simplify complex information and move away from tiresome clichés (Braddock, 1992). Ironically, however, stereotypes and metaphors are in many ways not that different. Pease Chock (1987) says that both stereotypes and metaphors “evoke larger contexts of associations and by so doing specify what is being said. Stereotypes’ metaphor-likeness draws attention to larger, usually hegemonizing, discourses ...” (p. 351).

Because stereotypes and metaphors serve similar functions of transmitting powerful and loaded information in shortened statements, the two parts of language are closely related and can overlap in mass media messages. Many stereotypical ethnic slurs are metaphors, too. “Frog,” for example, is a pejorative term for a French person. Of course, French people are not literally amphibious frogs, but instead the term (which was originally intended for the Dutch people because of their marshy homeland) partly refers to a French recipe for frogs (“Why do the French ...?” 2003).

Metaphor usage

Metaphorical language has been in use and studied since the time of Aristotle and other foundational philosophers in ancient Greece, and it appears in many early works of literature throughout the world. Metaphors have become so common that they seem ubiquitous. In more recent history, Sopory and Dillard (2002) discuss three important theories of metaphor comprehension: the literal-primacy view, salience-imbalance theory, and structure-mapping theory. The literal-primacy view considers metaphors as a part of language that is literally false. Supporters of the view argue that tension is caused by this false statement, and the brain searches for the nonliteral meaning of the metaphor so that the tension will be released. Salience-imbalance theory suggests that people apply attributes to metaphorical language to further understand the comparisons. Metaphors are comprehended by ordering attributes of words by importance, with the first ones that come to mind being the most important. For example, attributes of “The classroom is a zoo” might be “animal,” “wild,” and “cage.” Structure-mapping theory also includes attributes of metaphorical language, but instead of ranking attributes by importance individually, the theory suggests that people comprehend metaphors by linking attributes into more complex ideas. So, in the aforementioned example, instead of just considering “animal,” “wild,” and “cage” as attributes, a person might think of “wild animals that belong in a cage” when he or she is confronted with “The classroom is a zoo” metaphor.

Sopory and Dillard also discuss the findings of their research. They completed a meta-analysis of other studies and then quantitatively analyzed the results. Their study discovered evidence to support the claim that metaphors, in general, enhance persuasion. The two say that under specific circumstances, metaphors are more likely to be

persuasive for the consumers of the metaphorical message. The ideal conditions for a persuasive metaphor include using the metaphor early in the message, creating a novel metaphor that will be memorable, and targeting a familiar and defined audience with the metaphor.

Likewise, Benoit (2001) found empirical evidence that metaphorical language can influence the thoughts and actions of people. Through studying the 1996 race for U.S. president, he found that Republican candidate Bob Dole and Democratic candidate Bill Clinton both used the metaphor of a bridge when describing their goals. Dole's metaphor was a bridge to the glorious past while Clinton focused on a bridge toward the future. National polls showed Clinton's metaphor resonated with citizens who kept it in the forefront of their minds and also potentially acted upon it on Election Day. These findings, along with those of Sopory and Dillard, further support a metaphor analysis of journalism-related films. Parts of language that persuade consumers of information to think one way or another are important focuses of study. Research on metaphors in films can reveal possible motivations of the message creator and possible effects on the audience of the film.

Journalism film critique

A substantial degree of research and analysis exists about journalism films and the representations of journalists in popular culture. Some research analyzed the depiction of specific professions under the wider journalism umbrella. Photojournalists, for example, were portrayed in a variety of ways in the late 1920s and 1930s. Brennen (2004) focused on 20 American films from that period and found stereotypical representations of photojournalists as bumbling sidekicks for comic relief or intrusive and dogged

paparazzi, an easy target of ridicule and distaste. Another study looked at the changing role of women in the TV news industry. Ditman (1993) used the 1987 film *Broadcast News* as a model for comparison with women in the real world. Although Holly Hunter's portrayal of a steadfast and hardworking TV news producer who succeeds professionally was an encouraging variation from the portrayal of a two-dimensional woman in TV news, the research suggests that most women who actually work in that field struggle to choose between having a career or having a personal life outside of the newsroom.

Ehrlich has completed several studies and books on the history of journalism films. His comprehensive oeuvre reveals several trends and characteristics about the development of journalism films, which he defines as "a distinct genre that embodies myths colored by nostalgia and that addresses contradictions at the heart of both journalism and American culture" (2006). Throughout cinematic history, the dominant themes in journalism films have included: screwball comedies and feel-good movies in the 1930s and 1940s, newspaper noir and dark crime-related films in the late '40s and 1950s, conspiracy films in the 1960s and 1970s, and myth and antimyth films about journalism archetypes in more contemporary America. The themes of the different eras reflected the current events of those times. World War II hadn't engulfed the U.S. yet when the carefree films and comedies of the '30s and '40s were popular. Post-World War II Hollywood took an edgier turn with film noir in the late '40s and '50s after the world had witnessed the horrors of prolonged battle across the globe. The Cold War and growing mistrust of the federal government following the Watergate scandal inspired conspiracy films in the '60s and '70s.

As for the last part of the 20th century, Ehrlich argues that as more media—such as the Internet and satellite TV—became available to people, traditional news outlets—such as newspapers, magazines and network TV—resorted to sensational tabloid journalism in an attempt to pull in readers and viewers. Sensationalistic stories of the 1990s were highlighted by the O.J. Simpson trial and the Monica Lewinsky scandal. The climate of the 1990s resulted in some films that showed a particularly harsh image of journalism, though Ehrlich explains that many of these films still portrayed the mythological journalist of earlier eras—one who struggles to report the truth because of selfish ambition or systemic suppression. Other films of the period flirt with the idea that “the truth” is ambiguous and shy away from heroic representations of journalists. This study explores 1990s films about both journalistic myth and antimyth.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Theoretical framework

Although it can be difficult to directly apply traditional literature analyses or language-based models to the visual nature of films (Hudlin, 1979; Pryluck, 1975), it is still important to recognize that stereotypes of journalists in films can bolster negative connotations about journalists (Zynda, 1979). Therefore, the social cognition approach can appropriately address the role of stereotypes in the larger social structure of journalism as perceived by nonjournalists. Dixon's research explains:

The social cognition approach conceives of stereotypes as belief systems characterizing various social groups ... This perspective views stereotypes as cognitive structures or categories similar to other social schemas ... These cognitive structures affect the encoding and processing of information, particularly information pertaining to outgroup members. (p. 62)

Dixon's description seems to suggest that once stereotypes become ingrained in a person's set of beliefs, that idea can restrict future information about the stereotyped group from being processed. In regards to journalists, those who aren't in the journalism field likely have some certain beliefs about those who are—which have possibly been initiated or reinforced by stereotypical depictions in film—and those stereotypical beliefs affect how information is processed. Dixon primarily was looking at the stereotyping of African Americans in television shows. The research shows that African Americans tend to be portrayed in sitcoms as troublemakers, and African Americans are shown disproportionately on news and reality TV shows as violent and dangerous criminals.

The social cognition theory will work equally well in a metaphor analysis about films. Both TV and films include fictional and nonfictional depictions of social groups, and both media also perpetuate longstanding stereotypes of various social groups.

Using the social cognition approach as a foundation, this metaphor analysis research of journalism films seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How did metaphors in 1990s American films describe those involved with producing news content, such as newspaper and TV reporters, media moguls and strategic communication practitioners?

The first question focuses on the metaphorical messages of films from the last decade of the 20th century. Because new metaphors are consistently created and old ones fall out of favor or are labeled “dead” metaphors to describe the loss of their original effect, it will be important to compare and contrast the use of metaphors throughout the 1990s. Metaphors that are repeated throughout a film or in multiple films might lose their originality and significance, compared with novel metaphors that represent a particular character or scene in a journalism movie.

2. What stereotypical images of journalists are suggested by metaphors in 1990s journalism films, and are the stereotypical images constructive or destructive to the institution of journalism?

The second question deals closely with the relationship between metaphors and stereotypes, which are similar in several ways. This question seeks to answer what overall stereotype—such as drunkard, sneak, or grouch—a particular metaphor or film might propagate about journalists. The stereotypes that accompany specific metaphors might represent the overall image of journalists that some film viewers internalize. This

question also intends to determine whether the stereotypes function to lionize or demonize journalists and the overall process of journalism.

Methods

The research questions will be answered through metaphor analyses of several journalism films. Ehrlich, a preeminent scholar on the subject, includes a well-rounded list of 1990s journalism films in *Journalism in the Movies*. This research will seek to complete metaphor analyses of *Hero* (1992), *I Love Trouble* (1994), *Natural Born Killers* (1994), *The Paper* (1994), *To Die For* (1995), *Up Close and Personal* (1996), *Mad City* (1997), *Wag the Dog* (1998), *The Insider* (1999), and *True Crime* (1999). Additionally, *The Pelican Brief* (1993) and *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997) will be examined. These two films should not be ignored because, according to box office figures from BoxOfficeMojo.com, they are the highest-grossing 1990s films in the U.S. in which a professional journalist is a main character and journalism is a main focus. *The Pelican Brief*, which grossed more than \$100 million, is one of several movies adapted from popular John Grisham novels. *Tomorrow Never Dies* grossed more than \$125 million and is part of the James Bond franchise, which is one of the top 10 highest-grossing film franchises in the U.S. (BoxOfficeMojo.com). The two films' monetary success suggests they were viewed by many people and likely attracted much attention during their time. Because of the films' financial impact, their metaphorical messages should be studied to reveal the stereotypes viewers were exposed to. Several other high-grossing films from the decade not mentioned in the Ehrlich book were excluded, such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), *Interview With the Vampire* (1994), *Scream* (1996), *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997), *Scream 2* (1997), and *Runaway Bride* (1999). These films

either featured journalists as primarily secondary characters, used journalism as a framing device and not a main focus of the story, or included main characters who were journalists but whose professional lives were not explored. For those reasons, they were not included in the list of films that will be analyzed. The 10 films from *Journalism in the Movies* are considered by Ehrlich to be some of the more influential and important journalism movies of the 1990s. The other two films, by nature of their large box office profits, were also undoubtedly influential. Because the films met these criteria, they were chosen to be the films that are analyzed for metaphors.

The 12 selected films represent a wide range of genres within the overall journalism film subject area. *Hero* and *The Paper* are comedy-drama films; *I Love Trouble* and *Up Close and Personal* are romantic films; *Natural Born Killers*, *To Die For*, and *Wag the Dog* are dark comedies; *Mad City* and *The Pelican Brief* are thrillers; *The Insider* and *True Crime* are drama films with elements of thrillers or mysteries; and *Tomorrow Never Dies* is an action-spy film. Also, the films' portrayals of journalists range from quite positive to quite negative. The films both reaffirm the journalism myths Ehrlich writes about—such as exalting journalists as protectors of the public good and searchers of the truth—and challenge the long-held tenets of journalism—such as by denying there is an objective truth and blurring the lines between fact and fiction.

The films that the research will examine closely are easily available to rent via Netflix or video rental stores, and several of them are available from university libraries. Theatrical versions of the films will be watched for analysis because special editions or extended versions of the films very likely will not be the same as those that were viewed by audiences in theaters in the 1990s. For consistency and because the theatrical versions

would better represent the metaphors moviegoers were exposed to—and potentially affected by—other versions will not be analyzed. Watching the films on a computer or DVD player will allow easy pausing capabilities so that the language of metaphors can be precisely noted. Online scripts are widely available for the films, but such resources often provide unreliable dialogue. For accuracy's sake, the metaphors will be transcribed verbatim from directly viewing and listening to the films. In case of a damaged or faulty DVD, another disk of the film will be obtained through another rental outlet instead of skipping over the part that is not viewable.

Several viewings of the films will undoubtedly be required to capture an accurate picture of all the metaphors about journalists. The films will be watched the first time to ascertain the general message and plot without paying particular attention to metaphors. After becoming familiar with the movies, subsequent viewings will include taking detailed notes about the metaphors themselves, the situation involving the metaphor, and initial thoughts and perceptions about the metaphorical language. A few days may be inserted between viewings of the same film so that fresh eyes and a fresh mind are brought to the film each time. Because of the nature of Netflix or other types of rentals, films will most likely be thoroughly analyzed one at a time. When a film has been watched several times and all the available metaphors have been noted, it will be returned to wherever it was rented from, and the next film will be sought. However, after the metaphors have been noted from all the films, in some instances films might be rented again if additional information is needed when the notes are being analyzed and compared.

Question 1 will be answered by identifying, analyzing and comparing the metaphors found in all the films. Question 2 will be addressed through reviewing and critically thinking about the notes taken during the films. Following a general guideline for the constant comparative method of data analysis, trends and categories of stereotypes will be examined and developed. Coding the metaphors and accompanying stereotypes into categories will likely reveal patterns and themes, such as journalists as exploitative predators, social reformers or naïve pawns. Once categories are identified, some categories might be combined because of a similar theme or deleted altogether if they do not feature a prominent theme that recurs in several films. Notes taken while watching and analyzing the films and memos taken during the coding process will make up the basis for the research findings that explain how journalists were portrayed in 1990s films.

Of course, the selected films might contain metaphors that neither describe a journalist nor illustrate the larger journalism process. These metaphors would be ignored because they would not directly relate to the way viewers' perceptions of journalists could be influenced by stereotypical messages. And, as films are largely visual media, visual metaphors will likely be common features in some of the selected films. An unrelated but useful illustration of this type of metaphor is that of so-called green energy. Hybrid cars, for instance, might be shown with grass growing on them, or light sockets might have trees growing out of them. Obviously, cars are not going to be produced that actually have grass growing on them, and trees are not connected to light sockets. The visual metaphors relate, or even equate, hybrid cars and energy-efficient light bulbs with nature. Visual metaphors in the selected journalism films might be mentioned along with general summaries of the movies, especially if they present particularly striking

comparisons, but they will not be the main focus of the analysis. Additionally, musical metaphors are commonplace in films. They can be noted, for example, in a horror movie when a foreboding soundtrack plays as a character slowly opens a door into a dark room where a serial killer might be hiding. Often, the music plays for dramatic effect even if there's no danger behind the door or if there's only minimal danger, such as a mouse that was making the noise. Similar to the visual metaphors, musical metaphors will not be the main focus of the research. Instead, verbal metaphors—either spoken or written—will be the main source of metaphor analysis.

Because metaphors have persuasive qualities about them and because metaphors are closely linked with stereotypes, a metaphor analysis of journalism films is suitable to further research stereotypical images of journalists in popular culture. Also, a metaphor analysis of such films does not seem to have been completed previously, so this research will approach the subject from a different angle and provide a new look at the issue. A study that utilized metaphor analysis successfully was conducted by Coleman and Ritchie (2011). Their study was about metaphors in biopolitical discourse, including Frankenfood, designer baby, vegetative state, and death tax. The research analyzed the metaphors and accurately summarized the emotions that they evoke, such as fear. They also discuss how limiting the metaphors are because of their narrow framing. Metaphor analysis will be suitable for the journalism film research, as well, because metaphors are full of rich and emotional language that can possibly reveal how the consumers of messages are influenced to both act and think based upon what information they are given (Benoit).

Summary

The research is expected to shed light on the way journalists have been portrayed throughout the 1990s. Ehrlich's writings suggest the metaphors in that decade will possibly be more melodramatic because several films from that time period seem to address the archetypal journalism hero and villain. Some of the stereotypes that are expected to be suggested by the metaphors are journalists as bloodthirsty reporters who are concerned with sensationalism, trailblazing journalists more concerned with righting social wrongs than professional advancement, and journalists who are manipulated and used by institutions with ulterior motives. Stubbornness and elitism might also come into play with journalism film metaphors. The metaphors will also likely reflect what was going on in the U.S. during the time the film was made. For example, Ehrlich discusses how *The Insider* depicts a *60 Minutes* producer's quest to persuade a former executive of a tobacco company to publicly tell his story on the news program, all of which is based on actual events.

Chapter 3

Findings

Journalism as a sport

Numerous metaphors that were found in the selected journalism-related films from the 1990s indicated a “journalism as a sport” mentality. Sporting terminology often was used when describing the journalism process. This at times could simply signal the filmmakers’ or characters’ familiarity with or affinity for sports, a popular pastime that transfers over to other areas of their lives, either consciously or unconsciously. Their familiarity with sports might make it a subject they fall back on when talking about nonsports topics.

However, the number of metaphors linking journalism to sport in several of the films indicates an overarching theme that journalism, like sports, has winners and losers, competing sides and winner-takes-all mindsets, and is a frivolous pursuit inhabited by performers seeking their own personal fame, wealth and power.

In 1992’s *Hero*, the first metaphor involving the journalism field occurs when Geena Davis’ character, TV reporter Gale Gayley, is standing near the ledge of a skyscraper, interviewing a corrupt and suicidal businessman. During their interview, the businessman throws himself off the building. Gayley asks her cameraman, Chucky (played by Kevin J. O’Connor), “Did you get it? Jesus, did I say that?” Chucky replies, “Yeah, I got it. Sports training—learn to follow the ball. Hey, listen, how ’bout you do your wrap-up from up here? I’ll pull back from that skyscraper there, find you here, then reveal the drop. Yes!”

In this exchange, the cameraman equates a human plummeting off a skyscraper with a ball that is hit in a sporting event. His quick reflexes that allowed him to keep the camera focused on a speeding ball—such as a baseball or a golf ball—also served well when filming suicides from skyscrapers. This metaphor illustrates the sensationalism often associated with journalists, which can be summed up with the adage, “If it bleeds, it leads.” The metaphor also trivializes life-and-death situations. For these desensitized journalists, witnessing a man jump to his death was like a day at the ballpark.

Hero is ambiguous in that it never reveals what actually happened to the title character. Some people consider Dustin Hoffman’s character, Bernie LaPlante, a hero who saved many people’s lives in a plane crash. Others have doubts as to whether he aided any plane crash survivors. This movie plays with the idea that there is no absolute truth, which is in stark contrast to journalism’s sacred mission—the pursuit of the truth.

Toward the end of *Hero*, the TV reporter, Gayley, tells LaPlante, “Mr. LaPlante, Bernie, I want to just for a minute talk to you like a human being, not a reporter. I’m somebody who was going to die in a burning plane, and I looked up, and this man out of the smoke, his face was all covered with mud and soot, and he saved my life. Off the record, was it you?” LaPlante replies, “Off the record, off the record. What’s that? Like timeout?” Hoffman’s character refers to going off the record as a timeout, further depicting the journalism profession as a sporting event or a ballgame. This links the journalism field with the entertainment and sports industry and equates journalists as ballplayers—ballplayers who are using every trick in the book to try to “win,” or get the story.

In 1994's *I Love Trouble*, Julia Roberts' Sabrina Peterson character and Nick Nolte's Peter Brackett character are rival reporters for different newspapers. Their quest to report a national news story first—and best—sets up their budding romance. Shortly after Peterson first meets Brackett and initially rebuffs his charms, she speaks with her editor by phone to assure her boss that she will produce the better story. “Don’t you worry. I own this story,” Peterson tells her editor. “Besides, a little competition’s healthy.”

Peterson’s comments to her boss suggest her rivalry with Brackett is akin to a race—a race where there can be only one winner. Brackett is considered a seasoned legend—both in the newsroom and the bedroom. Peterson, a younger reporter who still has to prove herself to colleagues and readers, seems to convince her editor that this opportunity to “compete” against an older, more experienced reporter will only make her better at her own job. That logic often appears in the sporting world, where struggling or mediocre teams think they can only improve by playing against star teams. After all, teams can become complacent and overconfident if they only compete against lesser rivals. Peterson feels that she is ready to go head to head with the best in the business and that by doing so, she just might learn something along the way, too.

To further reinforce the idea that journalism is a contest and that journalists are athletes who must pace themselves to win, Peterson later tells Brackett, “Hey, you’re a legend. It’s amazing just being in the same arena with you, really.” The character of Peterson could have just as easily used phrases such as “on the same stage” or “in the same galaxy” instead of “in the same arena” to express her admiration of the Brackett aura. Instead, the writers of *I Love Trouble*, Charles Shyer and Nancy Meyers,

apparently chose to use a sports metaphor. At best for journalism's cause, the arena metaphor expresses the idea that journalists are driven and dedicated to succeed at their careers, like athletes in a sporting arena. At worst, the metaphor recalls imagery of gladiators in a Roman arena, where fights to the death, animal hunts and executions were routine entertainment.

Peterson and Brackett ultimately decide to join forces—both on a professional level and a personal level. They conclude they can cover more ground in their research and investigation for their national news story with two reporters working toward a common goal, instead of one. Following this partnership, several more metaphorical references to sports are made in the film.

Brackett says to Peterson, “So, what do you think? Are we a team?” Peterson replies, “I suppose it is the sensible thing to do.” Brackett then says, “We’ll we’re going to have to be completely honest with each other. No more double-crossing,” and Peterson adds, “No more tricks.”

This back-and-forth that equates Peterson and Brackett as a “team” mentions “double-crossing” and “tricks,” which implies that journalism is not only an offensive mission (i.e., the pursuit of the truth), but also a defensive game wherein reporters sabotage one another with red herrings and, quite literally in *I Love Trouble*, wild goose chases.

In another sports reference, Brackett later tells Peterson, “I knew you were trouble the first time I laid eyes on you. Major league trouble, I said to myself.”

Other metaphors in *I Love Trouble* directly refer to the process of journalism as a “game.” Toward the end of the film, Peterson tells Brackett, “Game’s over, Brackett, and

you lose,” and shortly after that, Brackett asks Peterson, “You ever think of writing a novel?” Peterson answers, “And give up the newspaper game? Never.”

Depending on the audience’s interpretation of the “game” metaphors—as well as many of the other sports-related metaphors in *I Love Trouble*—they could be viewed innocently as implying journalism is an exciting, adrenaline-inducing profession, like that of ballplayers in a ballgame. But considering the film overall was a romantic comedy that portrayed journalists as sometimes sneaky and hormonal attention-seekers, it is quite plausible audiences were left linking journalists with the negative aspects associated with sports “games.” Instead of noble attempts to display human strength and grit and means by which to rally community members together, games also can be viewed as trivial pastimes where practitioners—if they can avoid being caught—lie, cheat and steal to come out on top, regardless of who is hurt in the process.

The Paper, another 1994 film, contains a sprinkling of sports metaphors, too. The movie—with elements of comedy and drama—is about a day in the life of an eclectic group of newspaper-people in New York City. Baseball metaphors, in particular, appear a couple times in the film. The first instance is when Jack McGee’s Wilder character, a reporter, tells Michael Keaton’s Henry Hackett character, a metro editor, “I struck out with the cops. There’s something definitely going on.” Wilder was tasked with investigating a double homicide.

Sports metaphors are a quick and efficient way to express an “us vs. them” mentality. Many sports involve two teams facing off, and in *The Paper*, the newspaper staff finds itself on “one side,” striving to produce a story about the rapid developments regarding the double homicide. The “other side” not only includes rival publications, but

also anyone who might impede the journalists from more accurately doing their job, such as government entities, law enforcement officials and uncooperative sources.

As with sports teams, there often are divisions within the “same side.” The employees of the *New York Sun* have bitter disputes and disagreements about journalism ethics, and Glenn Close’s Alicia Clark character is even shot in the leg as the result of a heated—and drunken—argument between a columnist (Michael McDougal, played by Randy Quaid) and a New York official (Marion Sandusky, played by Jason Alexander), who thought he had been targeted unfairly in the columns. Disagreements among the newspaper employees occur about not only ethics, but also the business aspects of a newspaper, which is experiencing financial hardships, leading to cutbacks.

Also in *The Paper*, hand-to-hand combat, such as that found in boxing or mixed martial arts is suggested in a statement from editor-in-chief Bernie White (played by Robert Duvall) to Clark, “I know you loved running features. I know Keightley shoved you into this administrative job you didn’t want.” His comment is reminiscent of a fighter being shoved into a corner during a boxing match.

White later tells Henry Hackett, “Page 1 is up to you and Alicia, but play nice.” Hackett responds, “I’ll give it a shot.” Their comments indicate Hackett and Clark do not always get along, though they are forced to work together, much like players on the same sports team who have their disagreements with each other.

Later in the film, city editor Hackett pleads to his wife and fellow reporter, Martha Hackett, played by Marisa Tomei, “Hon, come on. Don’t take the bat out of my hand. It’s the ninth inning. I gotta get the quote. The guy won’t be there all night.” This metaphor expresses the fast-paced nature of journalism, especially at a big-city daily.

Deadlines are constantly hovering over reporters, many of whom are never really “off the clock.” Every day to the *Sun* reporters might feel like the ninth inning of a baseball game, and some days they might strike out (i.e., not get the details or quotes they had hoped for), though other days they might hit home runs (i.e., obtain exclusive information that readers need to know).

Baseball innings also come up in 1998’s *Wag the Dog*, a movie about a film producer who helps stage a fake war, which is a red herring to distract both the media and citizens from a brewing sex scandal involving the U.S. president. The producer, Stanley Motss (played by Dustin Hoffman), tells his cohorts, “Bottom of the ninth, all right? They don’t know who they’re playing with. They don’t shut down our picture.”

In *Wag the Dog*, the “home team” that is featured most prominently is the group of influencers who create stories to mislead the public and the media. The group does just about everything that legitimate journalists are not supposed to do. This film serves as a reminder that sometimes journalists do not have the home field advantage; sometimes they must play on a field with crooked lines, improper proportions and nonregulation dimensions. What from faraway might appear to be a normal baseball field, is not always.

Motss later remarks to Winifred Ames (played by Anne Heche), part of the team of spin doctors, “Well, you see, Winifred, this is where you’ve never been at a pitch (meeting).” Ames had expressed doubts about how to successfully hide the fact that the “war hero” of the fictitious war had spent time in prison. *Wag the Dog* is about taking public relations to the extreme. Beyond just highlighting perceived positives of their client and withholding negative information about him, this team of influencers creates

fantastical storylines with inherently false narratives. As in baseball, the players at bat do not always know what kind of pitch will come their way. Similarly, *Wag the Dog* is a cautionary tale for journalists—and the public—to not always believe the information they are provided, or “pitched.” A healthy dose of skepticism is necessary for journalists because some prepared statements or news releases are accurate, and others are purposely misleading, like a curveball.

A baseball metaphor is used yet again in *The Insider* from 1999. The movie is about a tobacco company executive, Jeffrey Wigand (played by Russell Crowe), who ultimately decides to go public with information about the company’s tampering with tobacco. CBS producer Lowell Bergman, played by Al Pacino, tries to reassure Wigand, “I am trying to protect you, man.” A little skeptical, Wigand comes back with, “Well, I hope you’ve improved your batting average.”

Based on a true story, *The Insider* portrays the forces working against Wigand and trying to silence and discredit him. Some of the resistance to Wigand and his claims comes not only from the tobacco industry, as one would expect, but also from some CBS network executives, who apparently do not want to risk a lawsuit that could put CBS’s sale to Westinghouse in jeopardy. Wigand has doubts about the reliability and integrity of the “team” he has chosen in CBS, and Bergman, too, ends up deciding CBS’s “batting average” is troubling, causing him to resign from his role at *60 Minutes*.

Although sports are often a team pursuit, individual moments in sports can be rewarding or stressful. In 1995’s *To Die For*, Nicole Kidman plays an overambitious TV reporter, Suzanne Stone-Maretto, who does not let anything get in the way of her dreams, even when it comes to murder. Like any good dark comedy film, the lighter moments

that at first might not be taken too seriously by the viewer shed a powerful light on real-life dilemmas. Stone-Maretto explains to her mother-in-law, Angela Maretto (played by Maria Tucci), why having children would interfere with her career goals. “A woman in my field with a baby has two strikes against her. I mean, say I’m in New York ...,” Stone-Maretto starts, before Maretto interrupts her with, “New York?” Stone-Maretto responds, “For instance. And I’m suddenly called to go on some foreign assignment like a royal wedding or a revolution in South America. You can’t run from place to place with your crew following and conduct serious interviews with a big fat stomach. Or say you’ve already had the baby, and you’ve got this blubber, these boobs out to here. It’s just so gross.”

Stone-Maretto’s statements echo the old adage, “A chain is only as strong as its weakest link,” which also could apply to sports, as in, “A team is only as strong as its weakest player.” Stone-Maretto desperately wants to be on a journalism “team,” and to obtain that dream, she is willing to be a “team player” and forgo anything that might be deemed undesirable in television news, including having children because pregnancy would affect her figure. Even though baseball is a team sport, standing at home plate with “two strikes,” as Stone-Maretto mentions, can be a mighty lonely place.

Up Close and Personal from 1996 features Michelle Pfeiffer as up-and-coming TV news reporter Sally “Tally” Atwater. Robert Redford plays veteran news director Warren Justice. Like for Stone-Maretto, Atwater’s individual actions help determine her role on a potential journalism “team.” But whereas Stone-Maretto made sacrifices in her life to help get her to where she wanted to be, Atwater’s magnetic presence on screen wows those in the TV news industry. After a successful on-air debut, Atwater is told by

Justice, “You come across on camera. You made a save. I’m giving you a shot as a reporter.” Justice sees value in Atwater’s skills, and like a save in volleyball, her singular actions benefited the whole team.

However, a fading reporter who has spent many years in the “game,” Marcia McGrath (played by Stockard Channing), is threatened by Atwater’s newfound glory. McGrath compares her experiences of reaching the pinnacle of TV news to one of the loneliest—and most critical—places an athlete can be. She tells Atwater, “When you get to be 42, you know what it costs to jump off the high board.”

Diving, unlike many sports, is often an individual pursuit, graded subjectively by a panel of judges. Solo divers also are more exposed than most other athletes—both because of the skin-tight swimsuits they wear and because all eyes in the arena are inspecting them and searching for any flaw, however minor it might seem. In solo diving, there are no teammates to hide behind who might take the brunt of the audience’s or judges’ criticisms. McGrath, in some ways, seems to feel trapped at her current reporting position. She knows if she were to give up this job and attempt to find another, she would open herself up to all kinds of criticism from potential employers. For her, remaining in a top position at one TV station helps prevent her from being judged by others. In essence, she chooses not to “dive” in order to help insulate herself what she perceives as her flaws.

The unpredictability of sports, such as poker, also is referenced in a statement by journalist Joanna Kennelly (played by Kate Nelligan), who also is an ex-wife of Justice’s. Kennelly tells Atwater that Justice was considered a “wild card” by the TV network. Justice’s at-times unorthodox methods prove successful, but when audiences’ tastes

change, his work no longer gets the results it once did. Like in a card game, the player might make the right decisions at the game's conclusion or not make it to the end of the game.

Also in *Up Close and Personal*, a voiceover before the first "Happy Weather" segment states, "OK, everybody, keep on your toes. Let's do this one for Uncle Dan." "Keeping on your toes" has its roots in sports terminology; players who put their weight on their toes are likely able to more quickly respond to any given circumstance. For example, a soccer goalie "on his toes" can more rapidly jump to the left or right, depending on the direction the incoming ball takes. Similar to the boxing or mixed martial arts metaphor in *The Paper*, *Up Close and Personal* includes a metaphor that suggests being "shoved into a corner." TV news station employee John Merino (played by James Rebhorn) tells co-worker Bucky Terranova (played by Joe Mantegna), "You put my back against a wall!" This comment was in reference to Terranova's wanting Merino to hire Justice.

In *Mad City*, Lou Potts (played by Robert Prosky) tells his co-worker Max Brackett, a TV news reporter played by Dustin Hoffman, "There's a line I will not cross." Brackett responds, "Lou, I'm not asking you to cross a line ... I'm saying you move the line." This back-and-forth suggests Brackett wants to "change the rules" of the "game," which in this case is journalism ethics. Just as a cross country race's or football game's outcome could be altered by literally moving the finish line or the sidelines, respectively, Brackett wants to influence the outcome of his dilemma by moving the metaphorical "lines" that dictate Potts' conscience.

Journalism as violent warfare

Numerous metaphorical references to murder, death, killing, harming, and destruction appear in journalism-related films from the 1990s. An escalation from mere sports—where more often than not, it only feels as though it is a life-and-death situation—warfare is dangerous and deadly, and often involves kill-or-be-killed scenarios. Such serious subject matter is expected in thrillers, mysteries, or action films, but the lingo of warfare also appears in comedies and dramas. This is likely in part because of war’s ubiquity. Nearly every society has participated in war, whether on a large or small scale. The United States, for example, has been involved, either directly or indirectly, in wars across the world almost ever since becoming a country nearly 250 years ago.

The language of violence and warfare can be used hyperbolically and sardonically, of course, but often within such statements—however exaggerated or humorous they might be—there are at least grains of sincerity in the speaker’s intended message. Metaphors related to violence and warfare, however absurd, still illustrate how films can shape people’s perceptions about journalism.

Perhaps one of the most common metaphors linking violence with journalism in 1990s films is the word “shooting,” and its derivatives, when referring to photographing or filming. The word “snapshot” originated in the early 1800s as a hunting term, meaning “a quick shot taken without deliberate aim,” according to the Random House Unabridged Dictionary. By the 1860s, “snapshot” began to be used in a photographic context.

Several of the 1990s journalism films portray reporters as hunters, in certain ways. Some reporters are gallantly hunting for the illusive truth, and others are selfishly hunting for higher ratings, salacious scandals and sensational stories, harming innocent people in the process. The old saying “The pen is mightier than the sword” could be applied to these journalists.

In *Hero*, the character of Conklin (portrayed by Christian Clemenson) remarks that TV reporter Gayley would do anything for ratings after a businessman committed suicide by jumping from a skyscraper. “Bet she pushed him, just for the great shot. Blind ambition,” Conklin says. In this case, the “shot” metaphor even is used in direct reference to a man’s death. Later in *Hero*, news director Deke (played by Chevy Chase) complains about Gayley, “She let Channel 8 get a beat on us.” This suggests rival news stations are like warring gangs fighting over territory, and the upper hand fluctuates between the two.

In *I Love Trouble*, newspaper editor Matt Greenfield (played by Robert Loggia), the boss of the reporter Brackett character, pleads with Brackett to deliver an article. “Brackett, you’re killing me,” Greenfield says. Brackett responds, “It’s written, I swear. You’ll have it in three minutes.”

Greenfield’s use of life-and-death language emphasizes the urgency of the journalism business. A series of deadlines must be met in order for the final product to make it into readers’ hands. If one of the deadlines is not met, the workflow of all the other newspaper employees down the line can be affected. In a way, Brackett is like a soldier on the front lines for Greenfield, a commanding officer. If Brackett’s

performance is not up to the newspaper's standards, it can reflect poorly on Greenfield, similarly to a military unit.

Also in *I Love Trouble*, rival reporter Peterson speaks to her editor, Rick Medwick (played by Charles Martin Smith) on the phone. Peterson expresses her concern that an allegedly guilty man responsible for a crime might be innocent of that crime after all. Medwick exclaims, "What are you saying? Do you think we're about to lynch a guy for something he never did?"

Lynching was a common form of execution in the past, and Medwick worries a potentially innocent man might be tried in the court of public opinion, via the newspaper. Although the man's life itself would not be extinguished by the newspaper, his reputation, livelihood and relationships quite possibly could be damaged or destroyed by an incorrect article linking him with a serious crime.

Natural Born Killers

Metaphors involving violence and journalism are perhaps most evident in *Natural Born Killers*. The movie is about a pair of serial killers who go on a Bonnie and Clyde-esque rampage across the U.S. A major plot point of the film is the fame the serial killers seek from the media and the media's willingness to glorify murder and mayhem.

Tabloid TV reporter Wayne Gale, played by Robert Downey Jr., follows the exploits of the serial killers. Early in the film, Gale's video editor, David (played by Evan Handler), expresses his concerns to Gale about one of the crew's TV segments, "We really raped and pillaged the first show to do this." One of Gale's cameramen, Roger (played by Kirk Baltz), interjects, "Well, we changed the order around so it wouldn't be super obvious." David then answers, "It still needs a new intro in my

opinion, Wayne. You can't cannibalize yourself all the time." Gale chimes in with, "Repetition works, David. OK? Do you think that those nitwits out there in zombie-land remember anything? It's junk food for the brains. It's, you know, filler, fodder, whatever."

In just that one short scene, which lasted less than a minute of the film, Gale and his assistants refer to their work as involving rape, pillaging and cannibalism. They call their journalism product "junk food," and they compare their viewers to zombies. Albeit, these are entertainment journalists and not necessarily candidates for a Pulitzer Prize. However, in the 1990s, tabloid journalism TV shows, such as *Inside Edition*, *Hard Copy*, and *A Current Affair*, were in their heyday. For many Americans, shows such as these were their source for news, however sensational or trivial it might seem, and the hosts and correspondents were recognizable journalists to many U.S. residents. Therefore, to discount the metaphors about or used by tabloid journalists in 1990s films would be a mistake. Like it or not, these metaphors still can shape people's perspectives overall about journalism and journalists, whether a tabloid TV personality or a respected reporter at an award-winning newspaper. Although "mainstream media" practitioners might think of tabloid journalists as somehow separate from the "important" and "serious" news produced by local, regional, national, and international reporters, consumers of news might not necessarily make that distinction. The old proverb "One bad apple spoils the whole bunch" might apply here for nontabloid journalists. Unfortunately sensationalism by definition attracts public attention, and the tabloid press amplifies its role in the media.

The rape, pillaging, cannibalism, junk food, and zombie metaphors also illustrate how desensitized these TV journalists have become. When covering gruesome crimes,

psychotic murderers, and gory bedlam is an everyday occurrence for them, it might only be natural that those acts of violence would become part of their workplace language.

When Gale meets Mickey Knox (played by Woody Harrelson), one half of the serial killer duo featured in the film, Gale says, “Anyway, the episode we did on Mickey and Mallory, it was one of our most popular ones.” Knox asks, “You ever do one on John Wayne Gacy?” Gale nonchalantly answers, “Uh, yeah, yeah.” Curious, Knox then wonders, “Who got the higher rating?” Gale flatters Knox and says, “Oh, yours. Blew ’em away.”

“Blowing someone away” often means shooting someone to death or killing someone with an explosive device. Again, Gale falls back on metaphors of violence in order to express himself, a sign of the savage business he is in. Gale seems to indicate his audience will respond best to the stories that are particularly bloody. Stories that will shock, stun, and excite the viewers, as though they themselves were under fire from a shooter or holding a ticking bomb in their laps, are what Gale seeks.

Later in the movie, Gale chides David for what Gale thinks is sloppy work. “David, this looks like it was cut with a fucking meat cleaver. And where’s all my close-ups?” Gale was referring to a TV segment of the tabloid journalism show he and David work for, and he again utilizes violent imagery—this time of a meat cleaver—to make his point. At times, Gale treats his journalism work almost like a recipe for a meal. He needs equal parts flashy graphics, sensational story, and shocking ending. Earlier referring to his viewers as “zombies” and his stories as “junk food,” Gale’s “meat cleaver” metaphor highlights his viewpoint that he and his crew are spoon-feeding the

masses—with a meal that is not necessarily healthy or well-rounded, but one that is craved by human’s baser instincts.

Toward the end of the film, Knox and his accomplice, Mallory Wilson Knox (played by Juliette Lewis), escape prison during a riot that breaks out. Gale and his TV crew are there to record the events. While reporting live, Gale tells news anchor Antonia Chavez (played by Melinda Renna), as well as all the viewers, “War has broken out here. Unlike anything I’ve ever seen.” Directly equating a prison riot with war further emphasizes the danger many journalists face as a regular part of their jobs. As in any war, journalists are in danger from all sides. Bullets and bombs might not only come from the enemy forces. Even if they are imbedded with allied troops, journalists could unintentionally be caught in friendly fire. Gale and his crew find themselves in direct danger from the melee that erupts in the prison. The subjects of their TV show—the bloodthirsty Knoxes—at one point had offered Gale and his crew a certain degree of safety because the Knoxes wanted the fame and glory that they thought TV appearances could provide. However, once the Knoxes finish using Gale for what they wanted, Gale no longer is safe, either, at the hands of the deadly duo.

Faced with the unbridled bloodshed by both prisoners and guards during the riot, Gale starts to not only passively record and report about the events, but he also starts to take part in the killing spree, emulating those he once reported about. Gale declares to Mickey Knox, “Let’s kill all these motherfuckers!” As Gale picks up a discarded weapon, ready for battle, Mickey Knox takes it away and says, “Gimme that.” Gale questions, “Why?” Mickey Knox replies, “You’re not centered, Wayne. Here, shoot with this,” and then he hands Gale the video camera.

From the beginning of the movie until the end, Mickey Knox was an unabashed murderer. Although his actions go against most humans' codes of morality and conduct, he was consistent in his actions. Gale, on the other hand, started as a passive bystander, profiting from the criminal actions of others. But by the end of the film, he wants to be an active participant in the violence. Mickey Knox apparently considers Gale to be the "corrupt" one of the two—at first only reporting about murders and murderers for the shock value, ratings, and income, but then wanting to get a taste of what it is actually like to kill someone. This is viewed as deceitful by Mickey Knox, who thinks he and Mallory behave how most people want to in their heart of hearts. But Mickey Knox believes the majority of people do not have the courage or motivation to follow through with murder, rape, and other violent actions, as he and Mallory do. To Mickey Knox, Gale was not being true to himself and his impulses until it was too late.

Mickey Knox also seems to realize that a camera can be a powerful "weapon," maybe even more than a gun or knife. Instead of having Gale "shoot" with a gun, Mickey Knox wants Gale to "shoot" with a camera. To the public, cameras are impartial observers that show viewers what happened without providing biased commentary. Once camera footage is aired, it also is nearly impossible to erase from people's memory or from human history. Mickey Knox realizes that for the legend—and legacy—of the Knoxes to live on through the annals of time, a camera is needed. Guns might help the Knoxes accomplish their immediate goals and allow them to live to fight another day, but a record of their exploits will allow them to live on indefinitely.

Tamer metaphors

In *The Paper*, the metaphors regarding violence are not quite as harsh as in *Natural Born Killers*. *The Paper* is a comedy-drama film, whereas *Natural Born Killers* is a black comedy-crime film, so the “violence” metaphors are a bit tamer. Early on in *The Paper*, newspaper reporter Martha Hackett tells her husband and the paper’s metro editor, Henry Hackett, “Well, *Daily News* kinda kicked your butt today, didn’t it? ‘Welcome to New York, You’re Dead.’” Martha Hackett was referring to a headline by a rival newspaper. Her comments recall a brawl between two people, a brawl where someone walks away injured and the “loser,” while the other walks away relatively unscathed and the “winner.” Regarding this particular story, *Daily News* won the “fight” with a more detailed and flashier article. The paper the Hacketts work for, the *Sun*, now will have to plan how to gain the upper hand in the next “battle,” or next citywide story the papers both cover.

Shortly after this comment, Henry Hackett then mentions to Martha Hackett, “It’s a good shot, though, isn’t it? That’s great art.” As mentioned earlier, the term “shot” in the photographic sense has roots in the context of firearms. The Hacketts admire a photograph taken by a journalist for the way it captures emotion and a moment in time. Photographs can provide a still glimpse of a certain action, analogous to the way hunters might mount trophy game, forever commemorating through still life a fraction of a larger narrative.

Soon after, Martha Hackett advises her husband, “Wear a tie for the interview, and promise me you won’t torpedo it on purpose, OK?” Henry Hackett responds, “Why would I torpedo it?” That soon is followed by Martha Hackett’s warning, “Don’t blow

it.” Henry Hackett is considering leaving the *Sun* for a potentially better job with the *New York Sentinel*. In this back and forth, Martha Hackett equates her husband with having the qualities of a submarine. Depending on which newspaper Henry Hackett is working for—or which one he is loyal to—he could be a big asset or a big liability. With the power and responsibility that comes as an editor at a major newspaper, Henry Hackett can protect his staff and newspaper defensively or target a rival paper offensively.

Echoing Martha Hackett’s earlier comments about the *Sun*’s “getting its butt kicked,” a reporter named Carmen (played by Roma Maffia) tells Henry Hackett, regarding a story about racial tensions in New York City, “If there’s gonna be a riot, which I think there is, then we should have somebody there. Unless you wanna get stomped two days in a row on the same story.” Again, the competing newspaper business in New York is portrayed as a battle or fight with winners and losers. Ironically in Carmen’s comment, she advises that to avoid getting “stomped,” a reporter from the *Sun* needs to cover an upcoming riot, an event that likely could feature violence, including violence toward journalists. To Carmen, heading toward danger and risky situations is part of the job and necessary to avoid being figuratively “beaten up” by rival papers.

Carmen later chats with another reporter, Wilder, and says, “We need art. And, please, don’t send Robin. She’s too green. If things get rough, she’ll miss the shot.” Wilder replies with, “Here she is. The Puerto Rican poacher herself! Who told you to cover Williamsburg, sweetheart?” Carmen is afraid a reporter with less experience might miss a crucial photographic shot, and Wilder then refers to Carmen as a “poacher,” equating taking a shot with a camera to taking a shot with a firearm. Wilder’s choice of

words indicate that like a poacher, experienced photographers can infiltrate a scene without being noticed, take pictures of their “prey” and then quietly leave without alerting anyone. Poachers often kill protected species, so the term also conjures up imagery of a photographer exposing the truth about someone in a position of power or an elite member of society, someone who has various levels of security ensconcing him or her in rarefied air.

Henry Hackett continues to be told by co-workers of the slip-up in the previous day’s reporting, when a major story was missed. Managing editor Clark says to him, “We got our ass kicked yesterday, so you want to beat everyone today.” This is the third reference to physical harm being done to the newspaper, even though at most, the error likely only resulted in a degree of financial harm and tarnished reputation. But to veterans of the newspaper business, the product might seem like a living being and part of their family.

Just as the paper can be physically harmed, or so it seems, to the *Sun* staff, the paper also apparently can cause physical harm. Henry Hackett advises columnist McDougal, “Give me a killer lead.” This is after Henry Hackett and McDougal have uncovered evidence that two African-American teenagers are, in fact, innocent of murdering two white businessmen, despite the teens’ being arrested for the crime. Some people might consider papers as running “character assassination” stories at times, in which an often prominent person is exposed as a less-than-stellar member of the community, whether justly or unjustly. In this instance, though, the *Sun*’s article aims to save two innocent people from possibly meeting a fatal ending in prison or by execution.

So the “killer” lead in the story might very well serve the opposite purpose—preserving life, instead of taking it.

McDougal also makes a comment suggesting physical violence. He tells Henry Hackett toward the end of the film, “What do you want me to say? ‘Good job. You struck a blow for journalistic integrity today?’” In this instance, the process of journalism as a whole is viewed as an ongoing struggle, and the battle is not just between two or three competing newspapers in one city. When one paper loses its reputation or is discredited, all newspapers and even other forms of media suffer. One misstep at one newspaper can cause consumers of all media products to think the sloppy work is widespread and par for the course with journalism. McDougal indicates Henry Hackett has intentions to show why journalism matters and why it is relevant—through a stellar scoop in the *Sun*—though McDougal also seems to think it might be too little too late after earlier mistakes at the paper.

After Henry Hackett rejoins his wife, Martha Hackett, at the end of the movie and it is revealed Clark stopped the presses to do the right thing and print the accurate story instead of an initial sensational one that villainized the teenage boys, Martha Hackett comes full circle and makes another reference to violence, as she did toward the beginning of the film. She tells Henry Hackett, “Guess you kind of kicked everybody’s butt today.” The *Sun* might not have won the previous day’s “fight,” but today, with an exclusive story about the innocence of the prime suspects in the double murder, the *Sun* can have its victory lap.

Although the focus of *Up Close and Personal* is television news rather than print news, the film shares similar elements to *The Paper*. At the beginning of *Up Close and*

Personal, a voiceover during the introduction mentions, “Hey, hey, kill the music, guys.” Similarly to *The Paper* with its “killer lead,” the elements of the TV journalists’ work in *Up Close and Personal* are like living beings that can be nurtured and grown or that can be neglected and left to die. Music, video and text all help accentuate the TV journalism product, and they are the product of someone’s hard work. On some days, the journalists “offspring” might be promoted to a prime spot, and on other days, their work might be eliminated.

Violence also is suggested in a remark by Justice when he states, “The Golden Rule of local news—if it bleeds, it leads.” Again, journalists’ work is aligned with a living organism, something that can “bleed.”

Later in the film, news director Justice explains to up-and-coming reporter Atwater why he decided to stop being a network news reporter: “I had a source, and I trusted the source, and I went with the story, and I got burned. . . . If you choose not to play on the team, you can’t afford mistakes.” Of course, Justice was not literally burned, but he likely was emotionally and mentally scarred after discovering he was deceived. Not only did he feel he was taken advantage of, he might have thought others in the TV journalism business saw him as “burned,” as though he wore a scarlet letter and was tainted. Current and future employers might have viewed him only in terms of that one mistake.

An employee at the TV news station, Dan Duarte (played by Miguel Sandoval), later tells Justice, “There are people out there fighting for this spot. And anytime I have a spot that advertisers are willing to fight for, then no problema. This is a good spot.” Often when people literally fight over a product, it is a tangible object, such as a toy or

electronic gadget during Black Friday sales. Duarte indicates ephemeral products—such as TV advertising—also can be highly desired and sought-after.

In reference again to Justice’s work history, another TV news station employee, Terranova, tells Justice, “You left too much scorched earth on the last pass.” The scorched-earth policies of battles during World War II are brought to mind. During those campaigns, a withdrawing force often would destroy anything in its path, to prevent the opposing force from having access to resources. Everything—including buildings, infrastructure, wildlife, animals, and people—were susceptible to the force’s wrath. In *Up Close and Personal*, Justice apparently has burned his bridges with a past employer and no longer is on good terms—or on terms, period—with his former co-workers. The statement seems to indicate reckless Justice is the one to blame for the soured work relationships.

Veteran reporter McGrath also uses “explosive” language to refer to a journalist when she is talking to Atwater: “Yeah, Chris Rice of Chicago. Dynamite news guy.” Whereas “scorched earth” has mostly negative connotations to it, “dynamite” could be viewed as positive or negative. Although dynamite can be dangerous if handled improperly and cause extensive damage, the explosive also can remove barriers and allow for progress when building roads and infrastructure. So McGrath seems to pay Chris Rice a compliment by comparing him to something that can easily change the landscape of a place for the ultimate betterment of the community.

Soon after, Justice tells Buford Sells (played by Noble Willingham), in reference to Atwater’s gumption, “Deep down, she wants to shoot up the town.” “Shooting up the town” leaves a lot of carnage and bloodshed when performed literally. Justice admires

Atwater for her “going in guns blazing” and “take no prisoner” attitude. That is, she is not afraid of a challenge, and she is going to do what she thinks is right for her, whether others agree with her or not.

Later in the film when Atwater finds herself in the midst of a prison riot, Justice advises her, “OK, you’ve got one thing going for you: You’ve got the camera. Whatever you do, do it on air. It’s the only weapon you’ve got. You’re their chance to tell the world what’s going on in there. Use the camera.” This message further stresses the idea that a camera is like a firearm, both of which are something people can shoot with. Similarly to a firearm, a camera can be used for protection or to inflict damage. In Atwater’s case, the camera serves as a witness to her possible peril and thus protects her. Anyone who might try to harm her during the prison riot will be captured on camera, which will show who is responsible for any potential criminal behavior. As for the prisoners themselves, they might view the camera as a means to inflict damage on the warden, guards, and others in control of the prison system. The camera provides a channel for prisoners to voice their concerns to the outside world at large, something they normally cannot do on any given day.

After her groundbreaking story while covering the prison riot from within the walls of the prison, Atwater earns a position as a reporter for a national network, IBS. Toward the end of the movie, an IBS anchor says during a reception for Atwater, “Next year, you can count on this: We’re going to be even better because the IBS news team just acquired a stealth weapon.” The “stealth weapon” the anchor refers to is Atwater herself. This is similar to the “Puerto Rican poacher” line in *The Paper* in that both poachers and stealth weapons operate while trying not to make anyone notice them.

Atwater can not only gain invaluable information and contacts by being “under the radar,” but also she can scoop other networks that will not realize what stories she is working on before it is too late.

In contrast, the film *Mad City* opens with an intriguing visual metaphor. TV journalist Brackett and his crew assemble what at first appears to be a sniper rifle, as though an assassination is about to take place. Soon, though, it is revealed the equipment being assembled is a video camera, microphones, and other tools needed by TV journalists. The way journalists—sometimes in packs—often pounce on unsuspecting news targets in movies can seem like character assassination, if not a real killing in some films. As has been suggested in *Natural Born Killers* and *Up Close and Personal*, the camera is a weapon that journalists wield. Depending on how the camera is used and the intentions of the journalist, the camera can destroy someone’s career or reputation, or it can reveal and protect the truth, however unappealing it might be.

TV anchor Kevin Hollander (played by Alan Alda) is reluctant to work with Brackett when Brackett finds himself in the middle of a hostage situation inside a museum. Hollander warns, “I’m not sharing a broadcast with Brackett. He’s a loose cannon.” Other journalists had been praised when compared to weapons in previously mentioned films, such as Atwater’s being called a “stealth weapon” in *Up Close and Personal*. However, Hollander is certainly not congratulating Brackett with his “loose cannon” metaphor. “Loose cannons” are unpredictable and dangerous. In the days of cannons’ being fired from ships, a cannon that came loose from its moorings could cause damage to its own ship and crew. Similarly, Hollander wants to distance himself from Brackett because Hollander is unsure what Brackett will do on air. Hollander does not

want to be caught up in any controversy that Brackett creates, whether intentionally or not, because he values the career he has built for himself.

Later in the film during a news report, Hollander tells TV viewers, “There are children inside that building held hostage at gunpoint. And inside that building, there is also the truth. The facts of this story are also held hostage, unfortunately, by Max Brackett. And I’m sorry to say they are all at great risk.” Literally speaking, someone can generally only hold sentient beings, such as humans and maybe animals, hostage. The language distinctions appear with other crimes, too, as “kidnapping” would apply to a person who is taken, but “stealing” would apply to a jewel that is taken. Hollander assigns human characteristics to “the truth,” which indicates how highly valued facts are to journalists. Hollander seems to indicate “the truth” can be harmed, possibly to the point of ceasing to exist. Journalists’ alliance often lies with the truth, regardless of what it is or how popular it is, instead of with politicians, moguls, and other people in positions of power.

Inventing wars

In another film, *Tomorrow Never Dies*, the hero’s search for the truth is complicated by a villainous media tycoon. Early in the film, the British minister of defence (played by Julian Fellowes) and Rear Admiral Roebuck (played by Geoffrey Palmer) discuss a brewing conflict between British troops and an unknown adversary—thought to be Chinese troops—in the South China Sea. The defence minister asks, “When will our ships be in position?” Roebuck responds, “Forty-eight hours,” to which the defence minister replies, “Christ, the press are already screaming for blood. The last thing we want to do is escalate the situation.” In this instance, the defence minister

implied that the press was seeking answers as to who was responsible for an unprovoked attack on British troops. Although the press wanted to hold someone accountable for the unfortunate turn of events, the “screaming for blood” choice of words could further the “if it bleeds, it leads” stereotype that journalists are pigeonholed with.

The main villain of *Tomorrow Never Dies*, a worldwide media baron named Elliot Carver (played by Jonathan Pryce), is called the “Emperor of the Air” and reportedly is “able to topple governments with a single broadcast.” When Carver throws a party to celebrate the launch of a new satellite that gives his news corporation “the ability to reach every human being on earth,” Carver makes a self-congratulatory speech, which includes, “Why did I do it, you ask? The answer is simple: power. The power to illuminate the far corners of the globe. Not for higher profits, but for higher understanding between the people of this great planet. ... I promise to report the news without fear or favor. I promise to be a force for good in this world—fighting injustice, crushing intolerance, battling inhumanity, striking a blow for freedom at every turn.” Some of Carver’s turns of phrase almost sound more like a general readying the troops for battle, rather than a media tycoon during a black-tie gala. In the movie, Carver has severe delusions of grandeur, and he deceives himself into believing his selfish and greedy actions are really for the greater good. He views himself—however incorrectly—as a crusader for world peace, using the warlike terms of “fighting,” “crushing,” “battling” and “striking a blow.”

Several times throughout *Tomorrow Never Dies*, words and messages are assigned the strength of humans or weapons. While Carver is writing hero James Bond’s antemortem obituary, Carver remarks to Bond (played by Pierce Brosnan), “Lacks punch,

don't you think?" Carver wants his stories to "leap off the page" at people to get their attention, and thus so he can sell more advertising and subscriptions.

Carver later goes beyond wanting an obituary that is like a slap to the side of the head and directly equates words with weapons. Carver declares to Bond and Bond's ally Col. Wai Lin (played by Michelle Yeoh), "You see, we're both men of action, but your era and Miss Lin's is passing. Words are the new weapons. Satellites, the new artillery." Bond remarks, "And you've become the new supreme allied commander?" Carver asserts, "Exactly. Caesar had his legions. Napoleon had his armies. I have my divisions: TV, news, magazines. And by midnight tonight, I'll have reached and influenced more people than anyone in the history of this planet, save God himself. And the best he ever managed was the Sermon on the Mount." Carver's megalomaniacal speech is perhaps one of the most exaggerated representations of journalists in film, though many contemporary viewers of *Tomorrow Never Dies* draw comparisons between Carver and Rupert Murdoch. Reinforcing his earlier speech at the gala in which he seemed like a general before a battle, here Carver describes his words and messages as weapons, his news satellites as artillery, and his news divisions akin to units of a company of soldiers. Unlike some of the other journalists mentioned as being a "poacher" or a "stealth weapon" in aforementioned movies, Carver has no intention of using his "weapons" for good. He seeks to sow discord in order to generate more profit for his companies.

When Carver orders his minion Richard Stamper (played by Gotz Otto) to subject Bond and Lin to the decidedly evil art known as "chakra torture," Bond quips to Carver, "I would've thought watching your TV shows was torture enough." Once again, the

media messages in *Tomorrow Never Dies* are assigned the human ability to inflict physical pain.

The power of disinformation assumes a leading role in a more comedic film, *Wag the Dog*. Creating a fake war to help the president win re-election is no problem for the unethical strategic communication practitioners in this film. When Ames, part of the team of spin doctors, begins to fret because the veteran selected to play the “war hero” for the fake war is revealed to have serious mental health issues, Conrad Brean (played by Robert De Niro), another spin doctor, tells her, “All combat takes place at night in the rain at the junction of four map segments.” A veteran spin doctor, Brean is accustomed to plans going awry. He is not frazzled by this newest unfortunate turn of events, and he views his team like a covert military unit, tasked with completing a secret mission. Like actual top-secret military activities, the work of this team of spin doctors will likely never be revealed to the American public.

After the spin doctors’ private plane crashes—another wrench in their plans—Ames continues to criticize Hollywood producer Motss, who hired the would-be war hero with a checkered past. Motss assures Ames, “This is nothing. Piece of cake. Producing is being a samurai warrior.” Motss, working for a group of spin doctors in *Wag the Dog*, thinks of himself as something of a “samurai warrior.” Like the original samurai, spin doctors generally work for and protect people in positions of power. Whereas the samurai used swords and clubs, the spin doctors use scripts and cameras. Although spin doctors are not necessarily traditional journalists, they are involved with the public relations field, and many moviegoers might not make a hard distinction between

professional journalist and spin doctor. Therefore, it is still important to consider how the pseudo-journalism professionals in *Wag the Dog* are portrayed.

Later in the movie when Motss and Brean discuss having the White House press secretary “officially” explain the “war hero’s” mysterious absence to the nation, Motss remarks, “Bring in the cavalry. Nick of time.” In the same vein as the samurai, the press secretary is viewed as a public relations professional who is part of the regiment that protects the president. Again, even though the press secretary might not employ traditional weapons, the secretary’s carefully constructed messages have the same goal of influencing a nation, swaying the public’s mindset and preserving the legacy of a powerful person.

Heroes and antiheroes

The Insider is another film that highlights the importance of integrity in journalism. Early in the movie, Mike Wallace’s character (played by Christopher Plummer) remarks to the overly protective bodyguard of one of his interview subjects, a prominent Shia cleric, “What in the hell do you think I am? A 78-year-old assassin? Do you think I’m going to karate him to death with this notepad?” As in earlier films of the 1990s, a metaphorical reference is made equating journalists with mercenaries and the tools of journalism—such as a notepad—with weapons. Wallace, of course, was a towering figure in American journalism, and *60 Minutes* was a highly influential show that was the impetus for real change in the world at times, so it is perhaps apt that the two are considered as powerful as assassins and weapons.

The character of *60 Minutes* producer Bergman later assures Wigand, a soon-to-be whistleblower associated with the tobacco industry, “I did not burn you. I did not give

you up to anyone.” Cultivating good relationships with sources is important for journalists. Because Wigand had knowledge of highly incriminating tobacco industry practices, he was somewhat paranoid and skeptical of anyone who offered to help him. Wigand also knew how powerful the tobacco industry was, and he was afraid for his life and family members’ safety. “Burning someone” in journalism is equated with betraying sources and perhaps destroying their career. Even if Wigand and his family were not physically harmed, the tobacco industry certainly could damage their reputation, career prospects, and way of life.

During a conversation with his co-workers, Bergman says, “OK, let’s look through the looking glass the other way.” Wallace asks, “What do you mean?” Bergman responds, “We got a guy wants to talk, but he’s constrained. What if he were compelled to talk?” Wallace quips sarcastically, “Oh, torture—great ratings.” Although to Bergman and Wallace, “torture” is meant in a joking way, to Wigand, his position between a rock and hard place might very well seem like a form of torture. Journalists often are portrayed as manipulative during their “interrogations” of people, trying to get their subjects to slip up and utter a phrase that, taken out of context, sounds incriminating or sensational. To those averse to reporters’ pointed questions, an interview with a journalist might feel like torture—at least in a mental or psychological sense.

When Bergman learns about a potential article in *The Wall Street Journal* that questions Wigand’s credibility, Bergman confronts the reporter for the newspaper and says, “Are you going to put the *Journal’s* reputation behind a story that’s going to blow up in your face?” Just as Wigand is concerned about his reputation being destroyed,

Bergman tries to convince the newspaper reporter that *The Wall Street Journal's* reputation is seriously at stake by using terms associated with bombs and explosions.

In *True Crime*, another film about a journalist investigating a serious issue, Clint Eastwood portrays Steve Everett, a rough-around-the-edges reporter for an Oakland, Calif., newspaper. Early in the movie, Everett tells his co-worker Michelle Ziegler (played by Mary McCormack), “Look, Michelle, it’s been a long weekend. Everybody keeps shooting one another, and I’ve got to write about it.” Everett’s hyperbolic statement reveals the type of career he has chosen. As a reporter who covers crime-related stories, he is immersed in the underbelly of society. Solely covering crime quite possibly could make Everett a jaded individual, leery of everyone and unsure of whom he can trust. Viewing the chaotic world through his glasses, he likely tends to see the worst in people.

Everett and Ziegler continue their conversation, and when Ziegler expresses anger, Everett says, “What did they do to you?” Ziegler replies, “Not ‘they.’ ‘He.’ Alan.” Everett asks, “Alan?” Ziegler then complains about their boss, Alan Mann (played by James Woods), “Yeah, he killed my sidebar on the Frank Beechum murder. I mean, if you ask me, something about the whole case stinks anyway, but that’s not the point” Everett says, “I read that sidebar.” Ziegler replies, “Yeah, well, it was good, Ev. Admit it. It was the best thing I’ve written in months.” Everett goes on, “That was the one where you say that the media glorified Beechum’s victim in order to mask our patriarchal culture” Ziegler continues, “Which helped create the violence that destroyed her. Exactly.” After confirming what the sidebar was about, Everett says, “Yeah, you’re right. He should’ve never killed that.” Feeling confirmation, Ziegler

exclaims, “Fuckin’ A!” Everett admits, “I would’ve tortured it.” Snarkily, Ziegler says, “Well, it might’ve enjoyed that.” Everett agrees, “I think it would’ve enjoyed every second of that.”

As evidenced in several of the other movies, the articles that journalists create are assigned human characteristics. Ziegler felt that she had nurtured her story into adulthood, able to stand on its own, but Mann “killed” it, and Everett says he would have “tortured” it. To journalists, it can at times seem their stories have life forces of their own.

The same terminology is used soon after by Mann when he says, “The paper tried to kill it because the owner was in bed with the mayor,” regarding a particular article. Later, when Everett and Mann are having a discussion, Mann says, “Didn’t I tell you Bob has been gunning for you since the day he got here? In his quiet, earnest, reasonable way. He’s probably glad you’re banging his wife. Now he has some ethical mandate to annihilate you.” Mann describes the interoffice conflict between Everett and Bob Findley (played by Denis Leary) in terms of violence, something that would be easily understood by crime reporter Everett.

Later in their conversation, Everett tries to convince Mann that there is more to a particular story than just a convicted murderer’s being executed. That is, there is some evidence that suggests the man is, in fact, innocent. They discuss an associate who has contact with the California governor, who is someone who might be able to assist in this situation. Mann warns Everett that Everett better have solid proof, “Or he not only won’t call the governor, he will eat your heart and throw your carcass to the dogs.” Mann seems to suggest that Everett is disposable, and a mistake could cost Everett his

livelihood. Through the cannibalistic metaphor, the idea of Everett's not having a heart is presented. Multiple times during *True Crime*, references are made to Everett's being "soulless," which is a stereotype of journalists that appears in other works. Especially for journalists who cover wars, crime, or other hard news, it can be easy to label them "heartless" or "soulless" because they are hardened and accustomed to seeing violence on a daily basis. Their work can lead to their desensitization, which can appear as uncaring or emotionless.

After Everett interviews the man on death row, he and Mann have another discussion about the angle of the piece. Everett explains, "Look, this isn't a human-interest sidebar. It's a cruci-fuckin'-fixion." Everett's investigation has led him to believe in the convicted killer's innocence, and he knows if he takes the easy way out and writes a routine story about a murderer and his looming execution, Everett himself is, in a small way, contributing to a flawed system that condemned an innocent man and "crucified" him. In this instance, a journalist's work could have literal life-and-death consequences for a fellow human being.

Toward the end of the film, despite helping free an innocent man from death row, Everett seems to still be running from demons in his personal life. While Everett is drowning his sorrows at a bar—another common stereotype of journalists in movies—the bartender remarks, "I'm talking to a dead man." This is another instance in *True Crime* where Everett is considered "soulless," as a "dead man" has no soul. Even though Everett has helped to save a life, which could be considered one of the most heroic acts a person can perform, he still lacks a sense of humanity, as though his alcoholism or gritty job has robbed him of that.

A journalist in *To Die For* portrays the antithesis of this role. In this film, Stone-Maretto pleads her case to TV news station employees Ed Grant (played by Wayne Knight) and George (played by Gerry Quigley) and explains why they should hire her. She stoically declares as part of her closing pitch, “I believe that in our fast-moving computer age, it is the medium of television that joins together the global community. And it is the television journalist who serves as the messenger, bringing the world into our homes and our homes into the world. It has always been my dream to become such a messenger. I look to you, gentlemen, now to make that dream a reality.” In awe of the grandiose statement, George simply says, “Jesus Christ,” and Grant says, “Gangbusters. Fucking gangbusters.” Both George and Grant are impressed with Stone-Maretto’s delivery. Grant evokes images of law enforcement breaking up organized criminal activity, indicating Stone-Maretto’s valiance and swiftness in defeating the men’s preconceived notions about her. Kidman played an attractive blonde, and it is implied the men viewed her in a sexist way as a model without experience.

Soon after, as part of the mockumentary format of *To Die For*, Grant states to the camera about Stone-Maretto, “After a few months, she wore me down. I let her do the evening weather report, which she was fine at. Although with all the preparation she put into it, you’d think she was covering D-Day.” After earlier referring to Stone-Maretto’s commanding personality as akin to law enforcement, Grant now relates her bravado to World War II soldiers storming the beaches of Normandy.

Journalism as carnal impulse or an exercise of the senses

As humans experience the world around them through their senses, it is not surprising that many metaphors in journalism films from the 1990s relate to the five

traditional senses—tasting, touching, hearing, seeing, and smelling. Smelling, especially, popped up in several metaphors in multiple films. References to journalists being able to “sniff out” a good story brewing or “smell” when an official is being less than honest are sprinkled throughout journalism films of the decade. This seems to indicate that a popular view of journalists is that they have an innate ability to find headline-grabbing stories and detect misleading information.

Along the same line as journalists’ inborn senses are journalists’ instinctive desires, whether sexual or otherwise. Both the senses and desires are, for the most part, beyond humans’ control. Metaphors that relate to carnal impulses or the human senses give a mortal quality to journalists. Unlike superheroes, journalists have flaws that affect their personal and professional lives, they are influenced by their urges, and they are susceptible to emotional reactions.

In *Hero*, TV news director Deke tells Stephen Tobolowsky’s character, James Wallace, about TV reporter Gayley, “What did I tell ya? They’re all alike, the good ones. They’re junkies for the story. Can’t let go.” Equating Gayley as a junkie suggests she has an addiction that impulsively pushes her toward gathering information for her stories. Like someone who is addicted to a drug, Gayley is a hostage to the truth, something she believes she requires to live her daily life.

Perhaps the most common metaphors throughout the selected films were those referencing feces. The necessity to expel waste from the body is part of the human—and animal—experience, and the related lingo is ubiquitous in everyday language, as well as films. The following are examples from the 1990s journalism movies.

In *Hero*, John Bubber (played by Andy Garcia), an associate of possible hero LaPlante, asks his friend, “Didn’t they interview you?” LaPlante responds, “I don’t give no interviews. That’s a lot of shit.” Toward the end of the movie, LaPlante philosophizes to his son, Joey (played by James Madio), “You remember what I said how I was gonna explain about life, buddy? Well, the thing about life is, it gets weird. People are always talking to you about truth. Everybody always knows what the truth is like it was toilet paper or something and they got a supply in the closet. But what you learn as you get older is there ain’t no truth. All there is, is bullshit. Pardon my vulgarity here. Layers of it. One layer of bullshit on top of another. And what you do in life like when you get older is you pick the layer of bullshit you prefer, and that’s your bullshit, so to speak.”

In *The Paper*, Martha Hackett tells her husband, Henry Hackett, regarding a boring tabloid cover, “Sweetie, it’s horse shit.” Henry Hackett replies, “I know it’s horse shit.” Columnist McDougal later remarks about one of his articles, “I bust my ass to find something fresh, and when I get it, I bang it like a cheap drum. People love this shit.” Henry Hackett later quips to co-worker Janet (played by Lynne Thigpen), “Look, keep all the bullshit away from me today,” which he follows up shortly after with, “Well sometimes you can just smell the horrendously shitty day on the way, can’t you?” Along the same lines as references to feces are those metaphors that link someone with the part of the human anatomy where feces comes from. Editor-in-chief White tells Henry Hackett, “The problem with being my age is everyone thinks you’re a father figure, but you’re really just the same asshole you always were.” Martha Hackett soon thereafter warns Henry Hackett about managing editor Clark, “Don’t take any crap from her, OK?”

Reporter Carmen remarks to co-worker Wilder, “You get the cops. I get the poignant shit.”

In *Up Close and Personal*, Justice criticizes Atwater’s work when he says, “It’s shit. ... It was all shit.” Justice later remarks to Atwater about his wife, “My wife, the candy-ass.”

In *Wag the Dog*, Motss remarks about an opponent’s commercial, “Why are they sticking with this age-old horse shit? Why are they sticking with the same old garbage?”

In *The Insider*, Bergman tells a Food and Drug Administration official, “I received a shitload of scientific papers from insider Philip Morris, anonymous. You or anybody in FDA know someone who can translate this stuff into English for me?”

In *True Crime*, Ziegler questions Everett, “All right, Ev, tell me something. If you’re such a hot shit, what are you doing stuck here in Bumfuck, California?” Mann later remarks, “Issues are shit that we make up to give ourselves an excuse to run good stories.” Along with references to feces and anatomy, some metaphors referenced where feces usually ends up—the toilet. Mann tells Everett, “Man, I must be on acid. So, you’re trying to tell me that you want to turn a routine execution piece into some big fight-for-justice story, and what? That will give me an excuse to stand up for you when Bob asks me to transfer you to the toilet? Is that it, huh?”

Referring to the news products of journalists or to journalists themselves as “shit,” “crap” or related words is a universal way to relay a message of disgust and disdain. All segments of society regardless of race, class, religion, and other qualifiers can relate to metaphors involving feces because defecation is a necessary ritual of the human condition. Comparing journalism or journalists to “shit, “crap,” “assholes,” or as

something belonging in the “toilet,” aligns the profession of journalism with a societal waste—a waste of time, money, and resources.

Perhaps piggybacking on the metaphors relating to feces are those relating to journalists’ having a “nose” for the business. Several of the films made references to journalists’ olfactory prowess. With the abundance of metaphors equating journalism or journalists to feces—as opposed to sweet-smelling flowers or perfumes—the “nose” and “smelling” metaphors perhaps intend to express how journalists can detect false information (i.e., “bullshit”) or bad news. Knowing which information is accurate and reliable and which is incorrect or misleading is a good skill for any journalist. Not only does it improve the quality of their stories, but also a sense of trust can be built with readers when consumers of the news are consistently provided with trustworthy information. Bad news can be a boon for journalists, as often stories involving murders, terrorist attacks, and natural disasters are what many readers seek. Having a “nose” for the gory, violent, and otherwise sensational stories is akin to vultures with acute senses of smell that guide them to congregate at decomposing carrion. The olfactory metaphors from the selected films are listed below.

In *I Love Trouble*, Brackett tells co-worker Sully (played by Joseph D’Onofrio), “Sully, go down to the train station, nose around, see if anything smells fishy.”

In *The Pelican Brief*, newspaper reporter Gray Grantham (played by Denzel Washington) tells his boss Smith Keen (played by John Lithgow), “You can’t take me off this story. There’s something there. I can smell it.” Keen replies, “Evidence based on olfactory prowess is inadmissible, in case you didn’t know.”

In *The Paper*, White declares to Henry Hackett, “We reek of opinions, Harry.”

In *True Crime*, Everett tells Mann, “Even Michelle thought the whole thing stunk. She thought there were discrepancies.” Soon after, Everett says to Mann, “The Mike Vargas thing, I was drinking in those days. You lose your nose when you’re drinking. My nose is back.” In the same conversation, Everett reiterates his claim to Mann, “When my nose tells me something stinks, I gotta have faith in it”

Similarly to bowel movements and sensing smells, *I Love Trouble* alludes to another such response. Brackett tells Peterson, “You know, there’s something about you, Peterson.” Peterson responds, “Irritating, aren’t I?” Brackett states, “The truth is, you make me itch.” Peterson retorts, “Well I suggest you get yourself some calamine lotion because I’m loving this town and I’m here to stay.” Brackett suggests that Peterson both figuratively and literally gets under his skin. The two reporters’ contentious relationship borders on Brackett’s being allergic to Peterson, according to his statement.

Other common metaphors of those pertaining to carnal impulses or exercises of the senses involved sexual-related talk. Sex has come to be an expected facet of many standard Hollywood films, and these 1990s movies are no exception. Sexual relations were implied in some of the films, and discussions referring to sexual activity, however crude, took place.

In *I Love Trouble*, while Brackett and Peterson are talking with a potential source about a secret formula that enhances milk production in cows, the source, Sam Smotherman (played by Saul Rubinek) asks, “What’s going on here exactly, guys? I mean why are you so interested in LDF?” Brackett responds, “Oh, Peterson here is a big milk drinker, that’s all.” Smotherman then says, “Oh, well it does the body good. Sorry. Come on, you’re not going to tell me? It’s gotta be something big if both the *Globe* and

the *Chronicle* are in bed together on it.” After Brackett kicks Smotherman for his flippant remark, Peterson clarifies, “I wouldn’t say we’re exactly in bed together.” Smotherman portrays the two competing newspapers as reluctant bedfellows, willing to work together to achieve their goals, if it is the only way possible.

Tabloid TV reporter Gale pleads with Mickey Knox in *Natural Born Killers*, “Now, you give an exclusive to Wayne Gale. We are talking a media event here. Promos on the Super Bowl, you know. The network will cream for it.” Gale suggests a juicy, sensational TV exclusive about two serial killers will be so pleasing to the network executives, it will drive them to ejaculate.

In *The Paper*, newspaper reporter Paul Bladden (played by Spalding Gray) tells fellow newspaperman Henry Hackett, “I won’t dick around with you,” during one of their conversations. Bladden works for a rival newspaper, and his statement is akin to “I won’t screw you,” in that he means he is being truthful and not telling Henry Hackett just something he might want to hear. Bladden is, in a sense, courting Henry Hackett because Bladden’s paper is seeking to poach him from his current employer. Instead of “wooing” Henry Hackett with flattery, Bladden is being straight with him and giving him the real story.

TV journalist Brackett pleads with his station manager in *Mad City* to go to a live visual feed of a hostage situation Brackett is covering, “Lou, this is the story of your career. In 24 hours, this turns into a gangbang, there’s a thousand people with cameras here, and if you don’t record it, everybody else will.” In this scenario, Brackett views the hostage situation as a sexual conquest. He currently has exclusive access to the scene, which allows him, solely, to exploit the situation for sensational breaking news. But once

reporters from other TV news stations show up, Brackett fears an all-out orgy will ensue. He will have to share his “sexual partner” (i.e., the hostage situation) with other eager participants. Like the *Natural Born Killers* “cream for it” statement, Brackett’s language suggests he receives some sort of sexual gratification from securing this exclusive story.

While trying to break up a tiff, Motss urges Ames and Brean in *Wag the Dog*, “Enough lovemaking, let’s go.” The three are working together to create a false flag diversion from a potential presidential sexual scandal. Motss refers to Ames’ and Brean’s disagreements and discourse as “lovemaking.” Similarly to couples creating life from having sex, these public relations officials are attempting to preserve the civic life of the president they work for. Both groups have an ultimate creation that results from weeks of nurturing. For the couple, the final result is a baby, and for the public relations officials, the final result is a media campaign that they hope will ensure the president’s clean reputation and lasting legacy.

Bergman asks Wallace in *The Insider*, “Are you ready or do you wanna keep fucking around and warm up some more?” Wallace replies, “No, that got my heart started.” The two TV journalists refer to aspects of their jobs as “fucking around,” as though they are as excited and titillated by their careers as they are by having sex.

Somewhat related to the metaphors with sexual overtones is a statement by Bladden to Henry Hackett in *The Paper*, “We’re thinking of letting our hair down a little bit around here.” To let one’s hair down figuratively means to act freely, without concern for social constructs. With the sexual liberation movement in the United States in the latter half of the 1900s, topics involving sex, as well as many other once-taboo subjects, were more openly discussed.

Another automatic function of the human body is its heartbeat; humans do not have to consciously direct their bodies to pump blood. Some of the metaphors connect such automatic functions with the journalism profession, suggesting that for the best journalists, reporting comes as naturally as respiration or digestion. In *Up Close and Personal*, Justice states, “Otherwise, I’ve just had the shortest career in the history of WMIA Channel 9, news heartbeat of the American Riviera,” a phrase later mockingly repeated by Atwater. Several other metaphors that follow in *Up Close and Personal* mention processes of the human body, such as eating or exercising. During a discussion about Atwater that Justice has with some of his co-workers, Duarte says, “You made your point, Rob. This is a nonstarter.” Justice replies, “She eats the lens.” Soon after Justice tells Atwater, “I figure if you’re hungry enough to fake it, you might be hungry enough to do it.” Later Atwater asks Justice, “So what is it like working at the network?” Justice answers, “You think you get to the network and look back at everybody that made you eat it and say, ‘Up yours,’ but it’s not like that.” Justice later instructs a co-worker, “You have tape of that? Run with that at 6.” Later during a conversation between Atwater and some of her co-workers, including Rob Sullivan (played by Scott Bryce), Sullivan states, “I don’t think Tally has her pulse on the finger of the community the way I do, Warren.” Atwater retorts, “I think you mean ‘finger on the pulse of the community,’ Rob.” Toward the end of the movie, Justice tells a general, “Maybe we could just sit down and chew the fat.”

Similar to the “run with that” comment by Justice in *Up Close and Personal*, Motss remarks in *Wag the Dog*, “This is a walk in the park,” when referring to a mentally unstable veteran and how Motss has had to deal with worse cases in show business.

Journalism as commodity or entertainment

Several of the films from the 1990s include multiple metaphors about the journalism profession and journalism professionals that portray them in terms of a commodity or as entertainment. Reducing people to a form of commodity or entertainment is, for the most part, dehumanizing. Seeing someone as a commodity negates nearly all the qualities that make him or her unique and instead focuses on what economic value the person presents. Similarly, categorizing someone or something in terms of entertainment discounts any traits or characteristics of the person or item, except those that are considered humorous, attractive, scary, or lucrative, for example. Natalie Portman, for instance, is generally referred to as “actress” or “Oscar winner,” rather than a scholar who has had research papers published in scientific journals. For many, her worth to society likely is determined by her entertainment value, rather than her academic contributions or other accomplishments. The reference to journalism as both commodity and entertainment has a number of variations, and each will be specified here.

Digging up dirt

A few metaphors in some of the films mention “dirt” in the sense of uncovering a salacious or sensational story. This can equate journalists with farmers or gardeners, who dig up vegetables to send to market. Instead of produce, though, journalists often are portrayed as digging up scandals for monetary gain, in order to sell papers or advertisements. News director Deke informs Gayley in *Hero*, “Listen, Babe, we need you back. You gotta follow up on the jumper. Find a human interest in the grim, unending woe that pours from the wounded heart of the heartless metropolis.” Gayley asks, “The dirt, you mean?” Deke confirms, “That, too.”

Later in the movie, “digging” is mentioned when Gayley, Wallace and Deke discuss how best to present and pursue a story. Deke says, “It’s not bad, but if you gotta wear a cast, you oughta feature it more. It’s part of the story. Network’s taking everything we give ’em. They wanna feed off our 6 o’clock whether we find the mystery guy or not. We’re very big nationally.” Wallace says, “It’s a wonderful piece. Emotional. I love it.” Deke asserts, “We’re going to feature Gale’s cast more.” Gayley responds, “My cast is only interesting until the hero shows up. Then whoever has him has the story.” Deke replies, “Good reason for you to find him, Babe. How come you’re here? You should be out digging.” Wallace suggests, “We could help her out, Deke. How about offering a reward, in exchange for an exclusive interview?” Deke says, “Money and news, Wally. Dangerous waters.” In addition to recommending that Gayley should be “digging” for an update to the story, Deke mentions that the network plans to “feed off” his station’s broadcast.

The metaphors enforce the idea that journalists’ products are comparable to fruits or vegetables that are harvested, and that the “produce” is then “fed” to members of public when they consume the news. Soon after this exchange, Deke announces, “Also, Gale’s onto something. Checking into his background, I guess. What’s it gonna be, Gayley? Dirt or more poetry?” Gayley quips, “Well we all know which one you prefer.”

In *I Love Trouble*, Brackett instructs co-worker Evans (played by Jane Adams), “Evans, dig up everything you can on this Boggs character. See if he has any friends, enemies, ex-wives, ex-lovers. See if he’s ever been fired, sued, done time, owes money, goes to church, pays his bills.”

In *The Insider*, whistleblower Wigand pleads with CBS producer Bergman, “You ever bounce a check, Lowell? You ever look at another woman’s tits? You ever cheat a little on your taxes? Whose life if you look at it under a microscope doesn’t have any flaws?” Bergman replies, “That’s the whole point, Jeffrey. That’s the whole point. Anyone’s, everyone’s. They are going to look under every rock, dig up every flaw, every mistake you’ve ever made. They are going to distort and exaggerate everything you’ve ever done, man. Don’t you understand?”

Foodstuffs

Many of the movies’ metaphors recall food items, one of the staple commodities. Some foods are nutritious and healthy for humans, whereas others offer very few nutritional benefits, if any. Journalists consider their products necessary for democracy to survive, though many people would question how “healthy” or necessary some stories are in the grand scheme of things. A diverse range of food metaphors can be found in these selected journalism-related films.

Gayley gives a heartfelt speech in *Hero* in which she uses an onion as a metaphor for the process of gathering news: “This is an onion. It’s a metaphor for a news story. Only a few hours ago, I was standing on a ledge, 60 stories above the street, interviewing a man who subsequently jumped to his death. Forty-million dollars in the bank, happily married, good health—great story.” At this point, Gayley displays a knife, along with the onion. “But there’s gotta be more. I mean, we’re pros, right? Some kind of extramarital hanky-panky, maybe? Another great story.” Gayley then throws a slice of the cut onion down. “Maybe the guy’s been accused of child molesting. Oh, terrific story.” Gayley throws another piece of onion down. “What? Turns out the accusations were false?”

Wonderful. More story.” Gayley throws another piece of onion down. “Maybe the alleged mistress was lying, setting the guy up, huh? Sensational story.” Gayley throws another piece of onion down. “So we keep going.”

Gayley starts to tear up from the onion. “Oh, excuse me. Keep digging, keep investigating. We expose the guy’s whole life, his family. Why? Because we’re pros. Because we’re looking for the truth. But what if it turns out after all our digging, after all our painstaking investigation, what if it turns out there wasn’t any truth? Just stories. One story after another, layer after layer until there’s nothing left. And if it’s like that, do we have any obligation to stop at any point, or do we just keep going, digging, digging, peeling, peeling, peeling, until we’ve peeled it all away, till we’ve destroyed what we’re investigating in the first place? I’ll bet all of you, like me, yearn for just one story that isn’t about unveiling layer after layer of human weakness. A story that reveals with each new layer of investigation something finer and nobler. Something even inspirational.”

After her speech, Gayley receives a hearty applause from the audience. After she wins a Silver Mic award at the event, Gayley shares the news with her co-workers over the phone. “Very nice actually. Um, ‘For excellence in the pursuit of truth,’” Gayley says as she reads the inscription on the award. A “pursuit” generally refers to an animate being chasing another animate being, as in a hunter pursuing a deer. In this case, “truth” is considered something that can be captured or harvested, and then sold to those willing to pay.

In *I Love Trouble*, Peterson tells her editor, “Sorry to bother you, but I think I got a scoop.” Although nowadays “scoop” might be most associated with ice cream when relating the word to food, the etymology of the journalism term “scoop” traces its roots to

the 1800s when the word was used to describe the action of acquiring something—such as a commodity—in a large amount, sometimes to the extent that others were prevented from obtaining any.

In *The Paper*, Martha Hackett complains to her husband, Henry Hackett, who does not seem too impressed with her most recent discovery involving a hot-topic story, “Oh, come on! I dump a big, fat, juicy steak in your lap, and you ask for sauce?” Soon after, McDougal remarks to Henry Hackett about the ease of writing a particular story, “This is great! It writes like butter. There is actual butter coming out of my pen.” Toward the end of the film, Clark advises Henry Hackett, “People take the *Sun* with a grain of salt. We’ll run yours tomorrow.”

At the beginning of *Up Close and Personal*, a director for a segment about Atwater’s life instructs her, “If you could just talk a little bit about how you got started, Tally. A few bio bites that you know we can play with.” As with earlier metaphors, a few “bites” indicates the media is “feeding” the consumers of news. Later in the movie, a co-worker of Atwater’s informs the news studio, “I’m getting something on the line. It may be Tally trying to feed.”

In *Wag the Dog*, after successfully brainstorming about a public relations campaign, Motss remarks, “When it’s cooking, it’s cooking. We’re cooking.” Later in the film, after realizing the veteran they plan to use in their campaign is mentally unstable, Brean comments to Motss, “Cause this dog ain’t gonna hunt.” The two seem to fear the veteran will not aid them in capturing their “game.” That is, their public relations campaign is at stake if the veteran does not get his act together.

Tangibility of journalism

Another common theme among the metaphors that fell under the commodity category was journalism as a tangible object that can be manipulated, as though journalism was a piece of plywood or an apple. Both plywood and apples can be cut, smashed, layered, and changed from their original state into something altogether new. Those characteristics often were applied to the process of journalism, something that is intangible. In *Hero*, Gayley has a conversation with co-workers Deke and Conklin. Gayley says, "I don't understand. You can't find him?" Deke answers, "Well, there's a lot of confusion around what took place last night, Gale. It's not clear." Gayley states, "But you said all the passengers were accounted for." Deke clarifies, "Apparently the guy that pulled you out wasn't a passenger." Gayley asks, "A fireman? A paramedic? He didn't have a uniform." Conklin chimes in, "From what we could get, there's a kind of, sort of a mystery guy involved." Deke confirms, "We're piecing together different accounts." Deke's "piecing together" statement suggests the facts are similar to fabric, and once they are all assembled, a "quilt" or bigger picture will emerge.

In *I Love Trouble*, Brackett tells Greenfield, "Don't give me that hound-dog look. I don't cover the beat anymore." Greenfield replies, "And I don't print recycled columns." Recycling generally refers to materials such as plastics, glass, paper, or metals, and Greenfield's statement emphasizes the repetitiveness of some of Brackett's columns. Just as a recycling center might receive thousands of water bottles that appear identical, Greenfield suggests he is receiving identical columns from Brackett. Brackett later asks Peterson, "Giving the front page a night off?" Peterson replies, "Oh, I put my story to bed hours ago. How 'bout you?" Brackett says, "Presses rolling as we speak."

Brackett and Peterson refer to their stories as though they are pets, livestock, or something that works for them and that they control. Later in the movie, Brackett sardonically states to Peterson, “I mean, I especially like the story you did blowing the lid off the Pillsbury Bake-Off contest.” Brackett’s mean-spirited joke aligns news stories with canned food or objects with a lid. Toward the end of the film, Brackett asks his boss on the phone, “So you tell me—all this adds up to?” The information and facts that Brackett has gathered are figuratively assigned numerical amounts that can be “added” through mathematics, as though his facts are items he has picked out at a grocery store.

In *The Paper*, co-workers can be overheard bickering about a story, “Just don’t chop the living shit out of this one like you did with the nun thing.” Words and phrases are compared to something like timber, which can be “chopped.” Several metaphors throughout the films suggest that facts or information are objects that can be “sat on,” like a chair the reporter is reserving until he or she wishes to make it available to the public. Reporter Jerry (played by Edward Hibbert) says, “But I’m telling you, I’m sitting on Watergate out there on Staten Island.” In reference to a story about racial tensions, Henry Hackett later asks his co-worker Bladden, “What are you guys sitting on?” Also in *The Paper*, several metaphors referred to the front-page headline as the “wood,” a term that possibly comes from some old printing press letters made of wood, a commodity. White tells journalists at a staff meeting, “All right, so Page 1, subway sounds like our wood, right?” Henry Hackett later tells Wilder and Carmen, “You know what? Williamsburg is turning into our lead. We could actually wood on this.” Toward the end of the movie, Henry Hackett tells a group of co-workers, “We’re ripping Page 1 for a new wood.”

Other metaphors in the film also evoke imagery of commodities. Bladden tells Henry Hackett, “You kinda missed the boat on that one last night, though,” as though Henry Hackett’s late article was cargo delivered to the dock after the ship departed. Jerry later has a phone conversation, and he says, “You try selling it at a staff meeting. Just had the shit kicked out of it.” His story pitch is equated with a retail item that he tries to “sell.” White later admits to Clark, “The people we cover, we move in their world, but it is their world.” Several metaphors in multiple films utilize the idea that the journalism process is like a blanket or a tarp that “covers” certain people or organizations. Similarly to a farmer with tarps covering some plants in a garden, the journalists can “harvest” stories from the sources under their watchful eyes. Later in the movie, Henry Hackett says during a staff meeting, “Hold on there. Let’s hold it. It’s not that clear-cut,” similar to the “chop” metaphor from earlier in the film. White later tells Henry Hackett, “It’s coal into a furnace, Henry. I’ve been doing this for 36 years. Every day you still start from zero.” White implies that newsgathering is a never-ending process, with the furnace, or public, constantly needing to be fed coal, or information. Later, as in *I Love Trouble*, Henry Hackett tells Martha Hackett, “I can’t stay. I have to put the paper to bed.” Near the end of the movie, Clark tells McDougal, “I’m OD’ing on righteous indignation tonight,” as though the truths revealed in the paper are like a narcotic to her.

In *Up Close and Personal*, Justice advises Atwater about her TV piece regarding a politician, “So we keep it loose. We keep it open. And if we get lucky: gold.” Justice uses the metal of gold to describe a successful interview. Terranova later tells Atwater, “Your voice is full of money. Anybody ever tell you that?” He likens Atwater’s voice to a cash register. Using the “cover” metaphor, Kennelly later tells Atwater, “A lot of

reporters think their job in Washington is to cover their bets. Warren didn't. He thought he was there to tell the story."

Carver tells his wife, Paris Carver (played by Teri Hatcher), in *Tomorrow Never Dies*, "When I was 16, I went to work for a newspaper in Hong Kong. It was a rag, but the editor taught me one important lesson. The key to a great story is not who or what or when, but why." Carver equates a past job as a "rag," a segue to the earlier "cover" metaphor. Whereas some newspapers' journalism processes are like an afghan, adequately covering respective beats, the "rag" newspaper in Hong Kong likely did not cover its community completely, instead focusing on tabloid fodder.

In *Wag the Dog*, Brean asks regarding sexual assault allegations against the president, "Who's got the story?" Ames questions, "Wait, don't you want to know if it's true?" Brean responds, "What difference does it make if it's true? It's a story, and if it breaks, they're gonna have to run with it." Brean links the accusations with a jar of jam or something similar that is breakable. With a jar of jam that falls to the ground and shatters, the contents can spread across a wide area. Likewise, with a story that "breaks," the information—whether true or false—is spread near and far. Soon after this discussion, Motss says the president is going to receive harsh treatment from the press, "They're going to run this man through the shredder." Brean states, "If we can hold the break in the dam for 11 days until the election, I think we've got a chance." Motss responds, "Yeah, but you can't hold the dam"

In addition to the "break" metaphor repeated, Motss describes the media as almost like a wood chipper, and once the press is finished sending the president through the chipper, he will be "shredded," his reputation in tatters. As in *The Paper*, *Wag the Dog*

also includes a “sell” metaphor when Motss criticizes the White House press secretary, “He didn’t phrase it right. He didn’t sell the line.” On the opposite side of the same coin, just as public relations officials can “sell” an idea, they also can “buy” time by releasing red herrings. After watching a press conference where reporters were steered toward focusing on the brewing “war” in Albania instead of the presidential sex scandal, Motss declares, “All right, you’ve bought yourself one day, maybe two.” Brean states, “String a few together. All I need is 11 until the election.” The “string” metaphor is reminiscent of the “piece” metaphor from *Hero*.

Echoing the “break” metaphor from earlier in the movie, Ames later states, “That’s good. We can leak that to the press . . .,” regarding the quickly assembled video of a young Albanian “war victim.” From the “jar” of false information, Ames wants a misleading tidbit to “leak” out to the public. The strategic communications process also is likened to the commodity of rubber when Motss tells presidential staff members, “This is where the rubber meets the road.” Near the end of the movie, Motss equates the successful public relations campaign with a contraption he managed to jerry-rig, “I put this thing together out of spit and polish!”

In *The Insider*, a co-worker of Bergman’s tells him, “Well if you could engineer it into the court record, you might have something. They would have a hell of a time trying to restrain his speech then, wouldn’t they?” To these journalists, part of their job includes “engineering” the information, as though it is a piece of furniture or a building. The “sitting” metaphor from *The Paper* also appears in *The Insider*. Don Hewitt (played by Philip Baker Hall) tells Bergman, “I heard Wigand’s deposition got sealed.” Bergman sarcastically states, “Yeah, they argued he was going to reveal the secret formula of

Kools to the world.” His co-workers get a laugh out of his joke, and then Bergman continues, “The seal doesn’t hurt Scruggs’ litigation, and since we’re the only ones with the story, I believe we’re sitting on an exclusive.” Wallace states, “I like that.” Later in the movie, Bergman tells Wigand, “Jeff, wake the fuck up. Everybody is on the line here. If they catch you in a lie, they can paint everything with that brush. You understand? Everything you say.” Wigand responds, “I told you the truth.” Bergman continues, “And I can’t defend you, man, with one hand tied behind my back because you keep from me what they can discover. And they will discover everything. Believe me.”

In Bergman’s line of work, he has to contend with potentially dishonest sources, and he alludes to any misinformation being a tainted paintbrush that can tarnish not only a particular story, but also an entire career. Toward the end of the movie, Wigand accuses Bergman, “You manipulated me into this.” Bergman responds, “That’s bullshit, Jeff.” Wigand states, “You greased the rails.” Bergman says, “I greased the rails for a guy who wanted to say yes. I helped him to say yes. That’s all. You’re not a robot, Jeff. You got a mind of your own, don’t cha?” Bergman suggests that some sources are like trains, and that through interviews and good journalism, or “greasing the rails,” the sources might be more open with their stories.

In *True Crime*, a similar metaphor to the “chop” metaphor is used when Everett’s lover, Patricia Findley (played by Laila Robins), tells him, “So you were the king of New York? So why are you hacking out metro stories at the Oakland Tribune?” Her statement makes it sound like Everett is carving stories out of a log.

People as a commodity

Another common metaphor throughout some of the selected films was the idea of people as a commodity—something that can be bought, sold or traded. Both journalists themselves and their sources at times were portrayed in such a way. In *Hero*, LaPlante accuses Gayley, “You media people. You think you can just buy people cheap?”

In *I Love Trouble*, a photographer at a party takes a photo of Brackett and Peterson and states, “Macy’s meets Gimbels. Love this.” The photographer equates the reporters with rival department stores, as though Brackett and Peterson are just moneymakers for their respective newspapers. The same sentiment is echoed later in the film when Brackett tells Peterson, “Yeah, Gimbels marries Macy’s—we wouldn’t want that to get around.”

In *Up Close and Personal*, Duarte tells Justice about Atwater, “Warren, you know as well as I do that she’s off the reservation, and it’s up to you to keep” Justice interjects, “To what? Rope her in? Cut her down to size, Dan? What size do you want her? Your size?” Atwater is referred to as being “roped in” and “cut down to size” as if she is a steer being readied for slaughter. Soon after, Justice questions Atwater, “Who the hell is this? What the hell happened to you? Where’s Tally Atwater?” Atwater responds, “You tell me. You should know. You invented her.” Justice states, “Well I did one lousy job. You come up here and you take one look at Marcia McGrath’s uptown Eastern act, and you fold. If I was in to inventing people, believe me, I would’ve invented someone a hell of a lot tougher than you turned out to be.” Atwater is referred to something that was invented, as though she is a robot.

Wigand accuses Bergman in *The Insider* of treating him like a commodity, “I’m just a commodity to you, aren’t I? I could be anything, right? Anything worth putting on between commercials.” Bergman explains, “To a network, probably we’re all commodities. To me, you’re not a commodity. What you are is important. You go public, and 30 million people hear what you gotta say, nothing, I mean nothing, will ever be the same again. You believe that?” Wigand answers, “No.” Bergman responds, “You should. Because when you’re done, a judgment is going to go down in the court of public opinion, my friend, and that’s the power you have.” Wigand asks, “You believe that?” Bergman replies, “I believe that. Yes, I believe that.” Wigand questions, “You believe that because you get information out to people, something happens?” Bergman answers, “Yes.”

Wigand continues, “Maybe that’s just what you’ve been telling yourself all these years to justify having a good job, having status. And maybe for the audience, it’s just voyeurism, something to do on a Sunday night. And maybe it won’t change a fucking thing. And people like myself and my family are left hung out to dry, used up, broke, alone.” Later in the movie, Bergman tells Hewitt while reading some files, “Persons who will profit from this merger: Ms. Helen Caperelli, general counsel to CBS News, 3.9 million. Mr. Eric Kluster, president of CBS News, 1.4 million.” Hewitt asks, “Are you suggesting that she and Eric are influenced by money?” Bergman quips, “No, no, of course they’re not influenced by money. They work for free. And you are a volunteer executive producer.” Bergman uses exaggeration to show how unlikely it is that any employee is not, at least somewhat, influenced by money.

In *True Crime*, Everett echoes the idea from *Up Close and Personal* that some journalists are like robots or machines. He says, “Mr. Beechum, you don’t know me. I’m just a guy out there with a screw loose,” as though he is some sort of malfunctioning appliance with a missing part.

Movies, TV shows and books

Journalism as entertainment was a notion expressed in several of the films. In *Hero*, TV cameraman Chucky likens his work to that of a Hollywood cameraman. “Yes, yes, angle on fireman. Heroic backlit. Blazing inferno! Look at that! Awesome! Major awards! He stands his ground while capturing images of raging flames with no regard for his own personal safety. Go, Chucky! Go, baby!” Chucky exclaims. Backlighting typically is a stylistic technique of photographers or camera operators when taking pictures of or filming staged events, such as engagement photos or a motion picture.

It is generally not an immediate concern of a journalist filming breaking news, like a plane crash or fire. Soon after, Chucky has a conversation with Deke and Gayley about a potential hero who rescued people after a plane crash. “That’s him?” Deke asks. Gayley replies, “Who else? We’ve accounted for everybody else. That’s our hero.” Chucky remarks, “I didn’t even notice the guy. I was into the foreground drama. Heroic fireman looming in the frame.” Chucky references breaking news caught on camera as “foreground drama,” as though what he witnessed—and what viewers will watch—is a made-for-TV movie. Chucky follows that up when he states, “Far out. Never saw him. It’s the camera—it has a life of its own. At times I feel as if we were one, together, capturing little moments of history in a kaleidoscope of colors and drama.”

Later in the movie, a promo for the “Angel of Flight 104” special news program is played, and the voiceover says, “John Bubber himself along with 20 of the real survivors of Flight 104. See the real-life participants re-enact the terrifying drama inside the burning plane. Out of the darkness, out of the fire, out of the nightmare of fear came the angel of Flight 104. John Bubber saved 54 people. This is his story and theirs. A drama featuring the actual people who actually lived those moments of terror. No makeup, no music, no actors. This is the real thing. Thursday night. Channel 4. Be there.” After the promo ends, Wallace asks Deke, “Upset, what’s he upset about?” Deke responds, “Oh, said he’s not an actor.” Wallace states, “Well, he’s not supposed to be an actor. That’s the whole point. He’s a real, live hero. All he has to do is act like a real, live hero. That’s the beauty of the concept. That’s the whole freshness of it.”

The newsroom now seems to be going so far as to create a fictionalized version of a true event. Before the movie ends, Chucky narrates another moment when he films a real-life event, “Zooming in, tighter yet. He captures the stark drama at great personal risk. Was I afraid? Well, at moments like that, you don’t think about yourself. You think about the focus, you think about f-stop, you think about the 11 o’clock news. Everybody counting on you.”

In *I Love Trouble*, Peterson tells Brackett, “So long, Brackett. See you in the funny papers.” Soon after, Peterson again addresses Brackett, “Look, I love my work, and this is definitely a very sexy story, but I guess I’m just not cut out for this ‘Lethal Weapon’ stuff, you know?” Brackett shortly after tells Peterson, “Well, we’ll investigate together, but we’ll write separately. I mean we’ll be like the Hardy Boys, except one of us will be a girl—a woman.” In addition to direct references to entertainment sources,

Peterson likens the articles she and Brackett are working on to a fictional story, with a “plot.” Brackett states, “Dr. Darryl M. Beekman, genetic engineering pioneer, died Tuesday in a fire at his Spring Creek home.” Peterson responds, “A week before the train crash. The plot thickens.” Later in the movie, Smotherman refers to a magician or a cheating poker player when talking about Brackett, “OK, now, in case you have any more questions or if you finally decide to tell me what you’ve actually got up your sleeve, here’s my card, Pete. It’s got my direct dial on it.” Toward the end of the film, Peterson reads the newspaper article Brackett wrote and labels it “poetry”: “‘As Vargas shouted his final command, the thin man’s eyes measured Peterson for a coffin. She turned, a breath away from the barrel of his .22 automatic.’ Poetry, sweetheart, absolute poetry.”

In *Natural Born Killers*, Gale says during a filmed clip for his TV show, “Their subsequent trial turned into a sick, pathetic circus. The nation caught Mickey and Mallory fire.” In addition to a “circus,” Gale later refers to the events he covers in terms of a book, “This is Wayne Gale, resuming live from Batongaville, where you can tell by the blood and carnage all around me that the final chapter in the book called ‘Mickey and Mallory’ has yet to be written.”

In *The Paper*, Henry Hackett comments, “It’s a Marx Brothers movie every time I step foot in my office.”

In *Up Close and Personal*, a voiceover at the beginning of the film mentions, “Let’s get ready to rock and roll. Tally Atwater affiliate promo standby take 1.” In giving background information about Atwater, Atwater’s sister says, “Sallyanne knew exactly what she wanted, and what she wanted was to be No. 1, in neon lights.” The sister’s comment recalls images of an entertainer’s name appearing on a marquee outside

a theater. Shortly after, a co-worker of Justice's, Harvey Harris (played by Daniel Zacapa), addresses Justice, "Warren, about the Anders sentencing today, I think the way we play it is by calling attention to a public servant violating the voters' trust." Justice responds, "No, Harvey, we play it straight." Their discourse is similar to comedy performers trying to decide whether to "play it straight" (i.e., act composed, as opposed to zany) or "play it up" for maximum comedic effect and laughter. Harris seems to want to frame the story in such a way that it will be most attention-getting and sensational, whereas Justice seems to prefer a straightforward, "just the facts" approach. Later in the movie, Sells tells Justice, "I'm just a noble fucking savage they trot out to the affiliate meetings," as though he is an exhibit in a human zoo or circus. Toward the end of the movie, a co-worker of Justice's, Merino, tells Justice, "It's your show," in reference to the station's feed from a prison riot going live nationally.

Tomorrow Never Dies also includes metaphors of national disasters as a "show." The corrupt media baron in the movie is the impetus for some of the tragedies, so in his own way, he is "putting on a show." While helping orchestrate a potential World War III, one of Carver's captains states, "The MiGs are making another pass." Carver's henchman Stamper then quips, "Let's start the show." Near the end of the film, Carver remarks to Bond about the war Carver is about to initiate, "It's going to be a fantastic show."

In *Mad City*, a rival TV reporter comments about Brackett's supposed exploitation of a hostage situation, "Look at this jerk. What a showboat."

Like in *Tomorrow Never Dies*, *Wag the Dog* includes mass media practitioners who create news events, or who create what appear to be news events, in order for their

personal agendas to move forward. Brean remarks to Motss, in reference to the Gulf War, “One video of one bomb, Mr. Motss, and the American people bought that war. War is show business. That’s why we’re here.” Later in their conversation, Motss asks, “You want me to produce your war?” Brean replies, “Not a war. It’s a pageant. We need a theme, a song, some visuals. We need, you know, it’s a pageant. It’s like the Oscars. That’s why we came to you.” Motss starts to buy in to the concept, “It’s a pageant.” Brean reaffirms his idea, “It’s a pageant. That’s what it is.” Motss states, “The country’s at war.” Brean asserts, “It’s Miss America. You’re Bert Parks.” Not long after, Brean tells Motss, “We just have to hold their interest for 11 days until the election.” Motss states about the made-up war, “It’s a teaser,” and Brean agrees, “It’s a teaser, absolutely right.”

Motss seems to think that because there is a limited time frame that the American public’s attention needs to be averted, he can approach the “war” more or less as he would a teaser trailer for a movie. Being a Hollywood producer—though working for public relations specialists—Motss makes several references to movies and entertainment throughout *Wag the Dog*. He declares, “The war isn’t over till I say it’s over. OK? This is my picture, not the CIA’s picture.” Soon after he says, “This is just Act 1: The War. Now we really do need an Act 2.” Motss later tells Ames, “Sweetheart, Schumann is the shark. OK? Schumann is Jaws. You know? You have to tease them. You gotta tease them. You don’t put Jaws in the first reel of the movie. It’s the contract, sweetheart. The contract with the election whether they know it or not is, ‘Vote for me Tuesday. Wednesday, I will produce Schumann.’ That’s what they’re paying their seven bucks for.”

Motss later states about Schumann, “You know, Connie, this here, Schumann and us Look at that: King Kong and the trainers.” Brean later states, “It’s going to be a masterpiece,” in reference to the “war.” Soon after, Motss remarks about Schumann, “He is a perfect war hero,” to which Ames says, “Oh, perfect. Well, you cast him.” Later in the movie, Motss states about Schumann, “I think you people are looking at this all wrong. If you look at the back story, you know, the guy is coming back from combat and torture, of course he’s going to be a little fucked up.” Toward the end of the film, Motss and Brean congratulate each other on a job well done because everyone is buying the “war” narrative. Motss remarks, “Lassie barks twice, and it’s time to take out the garbage.” Brean agrees and says, “Hell of a show, Stan. Hell of a job.”

Shortly thereafter, Motss comments about why it paid off to not give up on the project, “The show must go on.” When Brean informs Motss that Motss will have to keep this project under wraps because the truth cannot get out to the public, Motss is irritated because he wants to take credit for the successful charade. “I made this lame turkey fly. I did it—pure Hollywood. I’ll tell you right now, for once in my life, I will not be pissed on,” Motss declares.

The entertainment references continue in *The Insider* when Bergman and CBS legal expert Helen Caperelli (played by Gina Gershon) have a discussion. Caperelli informs Bergman, “Well, with tortious interference, I’m afraid the greater the truth, the greater the damage.” Bergman asks, “Come again?” Caperelli explains, “They own the information he’s disclosing. The truer it is, the greater the damage to them. If he lied, he didn’t disclose their information, and the damages are smaller.” Bergman wonders, “Is this *Alice in Wonderland*?”

In *True Crime*, Findley tells Everett, “But I’m warning you, do not pull a Dick Tracy on this. OK, I don’t want some big investigative piece.” Soon after, Everett speaks to his wife, Barbara Everett (played by Diane Venora), on the phone, “I’m at the paper. They roped me in.” His language makes it sound like he is a participant in a rodeo, which is apropos because he soon tells his co-worker Bridget Rossiter (played by Christine Ebersole), “Look, anybody calls, I’m at the zoo.” Rossiter quips, “Me, too.” Later in the movie, Everett equates his job to a coloring book during a conversation with Mann. Mann states, “I understand your interview at the prison went beyond the requirements of a human-interest sidebar.” Everett replies, “I colored outside the lines a little bit, but I don’t think the warden was sore about it.” After an argument between Everett and Findley a little later, Mann says, “I’ve enjoyed this episode of *Oprah*, fellas ...” Near the end of the film, Everett’s daughter, Kate Everett (played by Francesca Eastwood), asks her father, “Where did you go?” Everett replies, “A wild goose chase,” a phrase that originated with a type of horse race several centuries ago.

Journalism as subhuman or superhuman endeavor

Whereas the metaphors that dealt with carnal impulses and the human senses directly linked journalists with all that it means to be human, flaws and wonders included, some metaphors cast journalists in a subhuman or superhuman light. The subhuman metaphors often negate the human condition of journalists, and the superhuman metaphors exaggerate their humanity and noble traits.

As for the subhuman metaphors, Gayley goes so far as to question whether she feels like a human in *Hero* during a conversation with Deke and Wallace. Deke declares, “Saving people is not our job. It’s just as wrong to step in to save someone as it would be

to push him off.” Wallace asks Gayley, “You wouldn’t push the guy, would ya?”

Gayley replies, “I didn’t say I thought we should’ve saved him.” Wallace asks, “You didn’t?” Gayley responds, “No, I said I wished it had at least occurred to me to consider saving him.” Deke questions, “What good would that do?” Gayley states, “It would make me feel like a human being.” Not long after this exchange, Deke reinforces the uncertainty regarding Gayley’s humanity when he tells Wallace, “I’ll figure something out. She’s pretending to be a person. She’s really just a reporter. Fifty bucks says she’ll be back on the first flight.” In several of the films, including *Hero*, numerous references were made about people being something less than human. During a discussion over the phone, Deke asks Gayley, “What do you mean what do I want to know? I want to know everything. Who’s this screwball LaPlante for Pete’s sake? What the hell are those two bozos chattering about? What? You can’t hear them? Read their lips. You’re a reporter. Improvise.” Gayley responds, “This is not a news story. This is real life.”

Deke states, “Real life? Jesus Christ, Gale, don’t crack up on me now.” Gayley questions, “Why? What am I? A professional? I’m a cynical, hard-bitten, professional hard-ass, aren’t I? A cold, ambitious bitch or something? Isn’t that what everybody says?” Deke replies, “No, Gale, you are none of those things. You are a goddamn creampuff. You’re a marshmallow. That’s why everybody loves you. Now try to be a professional marshmallow and get out there and report the goddamn human drama.”

After shouting out the window to Bubber, Gayley tells Deke, “I quit, Deke.” Deke snaps, “You can’t quit. It’s unprofessional.” Gayley is called a “creampuff” and a “marshmallow”—two foods that can be dainty and easily squashed.

In *I Love Trouble*, Brackett tells Greenfield, regarding Peterson, “She’s an overzealous cub reporter, second day on the job. You and I both know I could scoop her any day of the week.” A common term in journalism, “cub” likens young, inexperienced reporters to baby animals, such as bears or tigers, that are not independent yet and still require care from adults.

In *The Pelican Brief*, newscaster Edwin Newman, who plays himself, asks Grantham, “All right, that leads me to my second question. Speaking for thousands of our colleagues who are in a feeding frenzy to interview her, where is Darby Shaw?” Grantham replies, “I think that also is a question for Darby Shaw, but I know that she is not available to answer questions as long as this feeding frenzy continues.” Newman’s and Grantham’s “feeding frenzy” comments suggest journalists are like sharks, devouring their prey, or story subjects, in a vicious melee.

In *Natural Born Killers*, Warden Dwight McClusky (played by Tommy Lee Jones) tells Detective Jack Scagnetti (played by Tom Sizemore), “Just so happens you can’t see him right now. He’s got a very special visitor.” Scagnetti asks, “Oh yeah, who’s that?” McClusky responds, “Wayne Gale.” Scagnetti snaps back, “Wayne Gale? That TV scumbag?” McClusky says, “We call them media, Jack. Why, don’t you like the media?” Scagnetti replies, “A worm in my blood stool’s got more attraction to me than that, OK, Dwight? The guy lives to fuck cops over.” Scagnetti equates Gale with scum (e.g., pond scum) and something worse than a worm in bloody stool, both of which are organisms that are about as far removed from the complexity of the human body as possible. Later in the movie, Mickey Knox tells Gale during an interview, “You’ll never understand, Wayne. You and me, we’re not even the same species. I used to be you,

then I evolved. From where you're standing, you're a man; from where I'm standing, you're a ape. You're not even a ape—you're a media pussy. Media's like the weather—only it's manmade weather. Murder is pure; you're the one made it impure. You're buying and selling fear. You say why. I say why bother." Mickey Knox compares Gale to a species other than human and to an ape. Gale's humanity is questioned again later in the film when he tells his wife over the phone, "I'm never coming home." His wife states, "Dinner's ready." Gale explains, "Don't you get it? I'm alive for the first fucking time in my life. I'm alive!" Shortly after this, Mickey Knox echoes Scagnetti's "scum" metaphor when he tells Gale, "You're scum, Wayne. You did it for ratings. You don't give a shit about us or about anybody except yourself." A little later in the movie, Gale admits, "All right, so I'm a parasite, so what? Life is cruel. No one said it was gonna be easy. The day you two killed, your ass belonged to us—to the public, to the media. That's how it is, and we are married, mate." As with the "scum" and "worm" metaphors, a "parasite" often is an organism very far removed from the complexity of the human body. Near the end of the movie, a visual metaphor is inserted that shows Gale as a satanic demon, complete with horns and covered in blood. The visual metaphor seems to suggest Gale literally has blood on his hands and is culpable for his role in sensationalizing the Knoxes' criminal exploits.

In *The Paper*, Henry Hackett questions Carmen, "Williamsburg, huh? That's Wilder's territory, isn't it? You trying to Bigfoot him?" His statement connects her with the mythical creature Bigfoot. In reference to Martha Hackett, Henry Hackett later says, "She's nuts," aligning her with the fruit. Henry Hackett later addresses a meeting of co-workers, "Goddamn it! So we fucked up yesterday! Why do you want to tuck our tail

between our legs and just take it for and do what everybody else does?” His question suggests he views his co-workers as though they were cowering or retreating dogs. Later in the film after referring to co-workers as dogs, Henry Hackett uses a similar metaphor to refer to teenagers who might be innocent of a crime they are accused of. Henry Hackett addresses his staff, “Come on. We’re not talking about some publicity hound who crawls into the cage and begs for this kind of thing.”

In *To Die For*, Stone-Maretto portrays herself as an innocent and harmless bird in a confessional-style mockumentary address directly to the camera, “As you can imagine, I was shocked beyond comprehension. To think that these disadvantaged youngsters who I had taken under my wing and spent my time with and who would only stand to ultimately benefit from my media savvy. To think that they might be responsible for this heinous crime. It simply boggles one with disbelief.”

Up Close and Personal included a few “subhuman” metaphors, too. Regarding McGrath, Merino tells Atwater, “Real warhorse, Marcia.” McGrath is compared to a tough and loyal horse that is used in battle. Later in the movie, a news anchor asks, “Tally, how are you?” Sells tells Atwater, “Oh, settle down, he won’t bite,” as though the anchor was perceived as a vicious canine. A little later in the film, Atwater addresses a going-away party and equates Justice with swine, “This is for Warren, who couldn’t quite make the party but is definitely on his way back home from what he calls hog heaven.”

In *Tomorrow Never Dies*, Carver addresses his team of editors and advisers via videoconference, “Good morning my golden retrievers. What kind of havoc should the Carver Media Group create in the world today? News.” The first editor responds,

“Floods in Pakistan, riots in Paris and a plane crash in California.” Carver says, “Excellent. Mr. Jones, are we ready to release our new software?” Jones replies, “Yes, sir. As requested, it’s full of bugs, which means people will be forced to upgrade for years.” Carver states, “Outstanding. Mr. Wallace, call the president. Tell him if he doesn’t sign the bill lowering the cable rates, we’ll release the video of him with a cheerleader in the Chicago motel room.” Wallace says, “Inspired, sir.” Carver remarks, “And after he signs the bill, release the tape anyway.” Wallace replies, “Consider him slimed.” Carver seems to consider his employees to be loyal dogs that will obey his commands and protect him from potential harm.

In *Mad City*, a television network executive (played by Randall Batinkoff) remarks about Brackett’s covering a hostage situation, “Look at him. He’s a pig in shit.” This is reminiscent of the “hog heaven” metaphor.

Another “scum” metaphor appears in *True Crime*. Rossiter tells Everett, “More and more office workers are insisting on the right not to breathe secondhand smoke.” Everett, a smoker, quips, “And more and more scumbags don’t care.” Several metaphors in *True Crime* suggest Everett is soulless, as though journalism is a line of work in which he has had to sell his soul. Everett’s boss Henry Lowenstein (played by Anthony Zerbe) tells Everett, “Well, speak of the devil. Alan here tells me I’m paying you too much.” Everett responds, “Well, you can rest assured I’m frittering it away on women and booze.” Lowenstein remarks, “You’re a real dyed-in-the-wool son of a bitch, Everett.” The “devil” metaphor is the first of several that portray Everett as a soulless man. Shortly thereafter, Mann tells Everett, “Stop fucking Bob’s wife. He doesn’t like it.” Everett quips, “What’d he do? Put it in the company newspaper?” Mann states, “Listen,

if he comes to me and he wants your ass, I'm gonna have to give it to him. Then you'll just be a hole with no ass around it." A "hole" suggests Everett has a void, perhaps where a heart or a soul might have once been. Later in the same conversation, Mann tells Everett, "What's your problem, huh? Tell Papa. You can come to Papa, you soulless sack of shit. Come on, what is it?" Later in the movie, Everett confronts District Attorney Cecilia Nussbaum (played by Frances Fisher), "You wait till morning. You better sleep goddamn well tonight. Because after today, I'm gonna haunt the shit out of you. You understand? I'm gonna haunt your ass all over this goddamn town." Nussbaum replies, "I am not Wally. I'm a lot bigger than Wally. You threaten me again, and I'll have little pieces of your life all over the gutter 'cause I'll blow the rest away." Everett likens himself to a ghost, once alive but now dead and soulless, haunting those who cross him. In addition to the metaphors that show Everett as without a soul, Mann also tells Everett, "Go get 'em, tiger," referring to Everett as a ferocious feline. Toward the end of the movie, Findley tells Mann, "Look, Alan, I gotta be clear on this, OK? This is causing problems for everybody, and I love the paper, but I'm ready to leave. I can't work like this. This is an environment that's become intolerable for me." Mann replies, "'Intolerable environment'? What are you, like some fuckin' feminist? Are you a cooze? What's wrong with you?" Mann tries to negate Findley's humanity—and masculinity—by reducing him down to a part of the female genitalia, as though Findley is not a whole human, but just one part of the opposite sex.

Some of the selected films also included metaphors that highlighted journalists as having superhuman qualities. For example, in *Hero* a female co-worker of Gayley's asks, "Is he like that in real life? So gorgeous?" Gayley responds, "He's pretty

remarkable.” The co-worker goes on, “You didn’t get it on with him?” Gayley says, “Don’t be ridiculous. I’m a reporter.” The co-worker asks, “Oh, what? Reporters don’t have hormones?” Gayley states, “Reporters have to rise above their hormones.” The two women’s comments suggest reporters are like stoic superheroes, unaffected by human “weaknesses,” such as hormones.

A few of the metaphors linked news outlets with the superhuman ability to offer “the world” to readers and viewers, as though the news outlet was Atlas, with the celestial sphere perched on his shoulders. Near the beginning of *The Paper*, a voiceover for a news station states, “All news, all the time. This is WINS. You give us 22 minutes, we’ll give you the world.” A similar voiceover in *Up Close and Personal* states, “News, sports, traffic and weather. WMIA is better than ever. You give us 30 minutes, we’ll give you the world.”

Also in *The Paper*, White tells Clark, “But there’s no more money for you. There’s a ceiling in this business, and you’re hitting your head on it,” as though Clark is a mythological giant who has overstayed her welcome. White’s comment to Clark shortly thereafter reinforces the point, “If you go over my head on this, you’ll only make it worse for yourself.” Later in the movie, Henry Hackett asks co-workers at a meeting about a questionable arrest, “Doesn’t this set anybody’s alarm bells off?” His statement equates journalists with having some sort of internal lie detector or radar that indicates whenever something is false or misleading.

In *To Die For*, Larry Maretto (played by Matt Dillon) tells his wife, Stone-Maretto, regarding children, “I sure would like to have a couple of them around the house. What do you think, Suz? Suz, what do you think?” Stone-Maretto responds, “I

think if you wanted a babysitter, you should've married Mary Poppins." Stone-Maretto links working mothers with having superhuman Mary Poppins-esque abilities, such as flying and magic. Toward the end of the movie, Stone-Maretto says directly to the camera in a confessional-style statement, "I think that being a good investigative reporter is very much like being a kind of secret agent." Her comment evokes images of James Bond and other spies with superior physical, mental, psychological, social, and sexual strength.

Toward the end of *Up Close and Personal*, Justice remarks about Atwater at a reception, "She was already the sun and the moon, all by herself." Similar to the metaphors regarding giving news consumers "the world," this metaphor likens Atwater to an Atlas of sorts, as though she has dominion over the celestial bodies.

In *Mad City*, Potts tells his co-worker Brackett, "The network called. It looks like you're back in the big saddle again, cowboy." As with the "special agent" metaphor, this statement evokes images of larger-than-life characters a la John Wayne's roles—characters who rarely suffered mortal wounds and who rarely missed their targets in shoot-outs.

In *True Crime*, Mann asks Findley, "You think Everett's an asshole, don't you?" Findley responds, "I don't think he's an asshole." Mann states, "You're wrong. He is an asshole. Trust me, I know him. But a lot of people who are good at their jobs are assholes, Bob." Findley says, "Look, I know that, Alan. All right, it's just that, it's not about that. It's just that everything with Everett is a big investigative witch-hunt. You know, like that Mike Vargas piece." Mann states, "Hey, he was a drunk then, he isn't now." Findley proclaims, "Oh, OK, so two months ago, he's a drunk, now he's Mother

Teresa. OK. All right, the point is, this is not a Steve Everett slash-and-burn job, OK? This is a sidebar. It's an issue piece." Findley sarcastically compares Everett to Mother Teresa, who was later canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. Linking Everett with a future saint is about as "superhuman" as one can be before entering the pantheon. Later in the movie, Warden Luther Plunkitt (played by Bernard Hill) tells Everett, "There's no use trying to figure out who's naughty and who's nice, and then come sliding down the chimney like a hero. Not on execution day. You're not Santa Claus." Although Plunkitt informs Everett that he is not Santa Claus, the metaphor still acts as a link between Everett and Santa Claus, imbuing Everett with magical qualities.

Chapter 4

Analysis

A binary approach to journalism

Simply put, sports usually have winners and losers. Yes, sometimes matches end in a draw, but more often than not with most sports, one team is declared the victor and the other is considered defeated. Many of the sports metaphors used to describe journalism or journalists within the selected films reinforce this binary supposition—in athletics, as well as life overall, some people are winners, and others are losers.

Of course, neither sports nor life are always that clear-cut. Sometimes the winning team members are later revealed to be cheaters, and the athletes' medals are stripped of them. Or sometimes an underdog team might feel like the winner even in second place, knowing how far the team has come from early in the season. "Winners" and "losers" are not always so black and white. There are shades of gray when it comes to different perceptions and ideas about what "winning" and "losing" truly mean.

Stereotypes serve as blanket judgments about particular groups, and stereotypical messages are often overly simplistic, allowing people who hold certain beliefs to rapidly consume and interpret the stereotypical messages that already align with their way of thinking (Lasorsa & Dai, 2007). Similarly, metaphors can promote overly simplistic messages of us vs. them, good vs. evil, black vs. white, man vs. woman, and winner vs. loser, for example.

This binary construct was suggested in several of the sports metaphors in the journalism films. In *I Love Trouble*, for example, the two main characters are reporters from different newspapers working on the same story. Metaphorical references were

made about the other reporter's being "competition" and about journalism's being a "game" played in an "arena." Each reporter seemed intent on becoming the sole "winner" of the journalism game, with the prize's being the newest scoop about the national story.

In addition to winners and losers at rival media groups, the idea of winners and losers among journalism and nonjournalism-related fields was expressed in a number of the films, such as *The Paper*. After he is assigned to write a story about a double homicide, a reporter in the movie references "striking out" with the cops. Just as a newspaper might be the "winner" over a "losing" paper when publishing a big story first, journalists might "lose" a game against the "winning" law enforcement agency that holds the information the journalists might need.

These metaphors create a false sense of binarism between "winners" and "losers" when the world is not defined that simply. Even though a newspaper might not be the first to report about a national event, publishing a complete, informative, and factual story should still be considered a "win" for any media group. Likewise, a reporter's not getting the information he apparently needs from a government entity should not necessarily be called a "loss." Transparency about the law enforcement agency's resistance to release information can spur the public to hold taxpayer-funded entities more accountable. As with most everything, "winning" and "losing" are a matter of perception.

Other metaphors that promoted this binarism included several of the warfare metaphors. *The Paper* mentioned references to one New York newspaper's kicking another paper's butt, and one paper's getting stomped in regards to a citywide story that multiple papers were covering. Again, one paper was framed as a "winner" and one was

framed as a “loser.” This time, instead of a sports game determining the winner, a figurative brawl or battle with physical violence dictated who won.

This binary approach to journalism can be too jejune for the complex and nonpuritanical society that most of the modern world inhabits. Viewing people and organizations as either winners or losers negates the reality of gray areas that exist in personal and professional lives.

Labeling a journalist as either a winner or loser is destructive to the overall institution of journalism. A journalist might have an off month because of personal issues, but that does not automatically make her a loser. She might come back from her period of struggle to dominate the newsroom and news industry. It would be premature to write someone off entirely just because they faltered on a story or bungled a photo assignment. Growth takes place because of speed bumps that people encounter, not in spite of them.

Considering rivalries among news outlets to have only winners and losers puts too much pressure on journalists to be first, longest, most popular, or any other superlative. Just because a reporter is not the first to announce breaking news does not mean she doesn't have important skills to contribute to the story. Publishing the first story or the most “liked” story is not what journalists should be thinking about when they are doing their jobs. Rushing to be first can lead to inaccurate or incomplete information being shared, and aiming for the highest social media or web analytics can promote unnecessarily provocative or sensational headlines that promise too much to readers, and thus stories that often ultimately don't deliver.

Not only is it problematic to frame journalists in terms of winners and losers, but also it is not helpful to picture interactions with sources and subjects as winning or losing experiences. A journalist feeling as though he has to crush an interviewee with antagonistic interrogations can burn a bridge with that potential source, as well as many others down the road. A bad experience with a journalist can form a lifelong distaste for the profession in the realm of public opinion, and many sources are not shy to warn others in their respective field about a “problem” journalist.

Instead of viewing rival reporters and sources—both official and nonofficial—as people who must be outwitted and beaten as part of a game or defeated as part of an ongoing philosophical battle, perhaps journalists portrayed in films should focus on other characters’ humanity, as well as how they can help people. By working together—both within the journalism community and the larger community as a whole—journalists can improve their products and the lives of news consumers. All journalists should have a common goal—shining a light on the truth—so they should also be able to help one another accomplish that goal.

Words—and images—as weapons

Several of the films included metaphors that compared journalists’ tools or final products to weapons. Metaphors that linked journalism to warfare included one in *Tomorrow Never Dies* in which the villain says, “Words are the new weapons”; multiple metaphors in *Natural Born Killers*, *Up Close and Personal*, and *Mad City* in which TV news cameras are referred to—either verbally or visually—as weapons; and a metaphor in *The Insider* in which a journalist jokingly suggests using his notepad to assassinate someone.

These metaphors can be a double-edged sword for the cause of journalism, one that is both symbiotic and destructive. On the one hand, journalists acknowledge the power that mass media messages have. Messages and information can protect or destroy, depending upon how the messages are intended to be used and interpreted. As the saying from *Spider-Man*—and many variations before—goes, “With great power comes great responsibility.”

Journalists should feel empowered by these metaphors, knowing that their work can make a real and positive impact in the world. They can bring attention to injustices, they can shed light on forgotten corners of the globe that are in need, and they can rally readers and viewers to act for the greater good.

However, journalists also should be judicious and mindful when creating messages. Stereotypes in messages—whether intentionally or unintentionally included—can persuade consumers of messages to think a certain way (Fiske, 1993). Journalists should be cautious to ensure people are correctly identified and facts are accurately relayed. Journalists who do not practice due diligence in their reporting could inadvertently finger the wrong person for a crime, imply misdeeds by a governmental organization or business, or cause unnecessary humiliation and emotional distress for victims of crimes. A person wrongly accused of a heinous act, a politician marked with a scarlet letter for corruption—when no corruption took place—or an innocent victim whose horrifying experience is overly publicized and detailed might come to the point where he or she thinks suicide is the only way to escape their shame and embarrassment. Or the person might seek revenge on the journalist who made the mistake.

What seems like a dramatic declaration by a megalomaniac in a James Bond film actually carries some truth—words are (the new) weapons, and they should be used wisely. Especially in today’s technology- and social media-laden landscape—in which statements and messages rarely, if ever, can be truly deleted or erased—it is more important than ever for journalists to recognize the power they wield. Indeed, the courts are further determining the weight of words in cases where cyberbullying or persistent phone or text messages have led to suicides.

The human element

Perhaps most beneficial to refuting the bad reputation journalists might have were those metaphors that dealt with the innate senses and impulses of reporters and others in the news field. However uncouth they might be, the metaphors affixed a certain imperfect human quality to journalists, and such metaphors might help demystify the profession of journalism for laypeople viewing the selected films.

Some metaphors—such as the one in *Natural Born Killers* suggesting network executives would be driven to “cream” for a sensational TV news exclusive—remind viewers that journalists, too, can be held captive by their uncontrollable emotions or desires. Other metaphors—such as the one in *The Pelican Brief* when a reporter states he can “smell” there is something more to a story than meets the eye—indicate journalists have a true calling for the profession. Both urges that can be scientifically accounted for and described—such as sexual arousal and bodily functions—and those that are unexplainable—such as gut feelings and intuition—lend a sense of humanity to journalists that often is lacking in Hollywood portrayals of media practitioners.

A “warts and all” approach to portraying journalists can help moviegoers more easily identify with those in the news business. Human emotions and urges span across all occupations, races, genders, cultures, and faiths, so regardless of the viewer’s background or point of reference, she likely can relate some aspects of her circumstances to a journalist’s, if shared experiences are explored in a film. Ideally, connecting with a movie character’s joys and struggles will transfer to the “real world,” and perhaps if the filmgoer comes into contact with a journalist in the future, she will not have irrational fears or preconceived notions about someone whose profession might have been vilified or tarnished as part of the zeitgeist on a national level.

Metaphors that illustrate a journalist’s humanity also serve to remind those inside and outside the profession to not place reporters—or anyone, for that matter—on a pedestal. To err is human, and journalists are indeed human. But because of the very nature of their work, their errors are often magnified and publicized for all readers and viewers to know. Of course, it is a good—nay, imperative—policy to publish or air corrections. However, too often pundits and trolls pounce on and bring undue attention to simple mistakes, and misleadingly correlate an error with a supposed systemic bias or clandestine conspiracy within a news agency.

Ringmasters of the spectacle

Troubling and detrimental metaphors in the films that equate journalism with a commodity or entertainment could weaken and destroy the reputation many respectable journalists have built throughout a lifetime of service. Such metaphors include those about “digging” up “dirt” on subjects in *Hero*, as though the reporters are farmers harvesting a bumper crop of salacious stories. Other such metaphors include the

numerous statements that align strategic communications with show business in *Wag the Dog*. In both cases—news as a commodity or entertainment—the idea that journalism is a fabrication is expressed.

These metaphors suggest news does not happen organically, with reporters as impartial messengers, relaying the information to the public. Rather, the concept of journalism as a commodity indicates that journalists cherry-pick the news items that will generate the most page views, most retweets, or most conversation around the water cooler—and thus, that most journalists cater to a bourgeois sensibility. Instead of news being passively reported by journalists, these metaphors indicate journalists report only what they deem to be news, regardless of whether the public is truly receiving the “full picture.” Instead of being provided with a wide breadth and depth of news stories, filmgoers might be under the impression journalists see themselves as “spoon-feeding” the masses with stories that might “taste good,” such as entertainment news and celebrity gossip, but that do not provide much “nutritional value,” as stories about new laws or election candidates might.

If journalists are not concocting a recipe for a sensational news story with handpicked ingredients—as the “journalism as a commodity” metaphors imply—then reporters are favoring flashy graphics, funny anecdotes, and rumors masquerading as truth for their stories, as the “journalism as entertainment” metaphors imply. Although the headlines and images of such stories might be appealing and eye-catching to the average reader, the overall content is likely meretricious. These damaging metaphors liken journalists to ringmasters at a circus, drawing the audience’s attention to one ostentatious display with hyperbole until the next choreographed act comes into the ring.

Lions and demons

Regardless of whether a metaphor about journalism is well-intentioned or disdainful, metaphorical language has an influence on people and their thoughts (Benoit, 2001). Metaphors that compared journalists to something subhuman generally demonized the overall profession, and metaphors that compared journalists to superhumans generally had a lionizing effect.

On the innocuous end of the subhuman spectrum, one metaphor in *To Die For* imagines the main TV reporter as an innocent bird. But on the toxic end of the spectrum, *True Crime* includes metaphors about journalists that include “scum,” “the devil,” and a “soulless sack of shit.” Even a seemingly inane comment about a TV reporter’s being similar to a bird isn’t exactly flattering. One of the major criteria for a TV news reporter is a clear, concise voice that viewers can easily understand. A bird, however, at best just makes pretty noises from its cage and isn’t taken seriously, a struggle the main reporter character in *To Die For* encounters often. If it is a bird like the budgerigar, it might be able to mimic words and statements, but it cannot speak for itself. At worst, a bird like the ortolan is sometimes blinded, force-fed, and drowned in brandy before being cooked, plucked, and eaten whole, part of which is possibly a fate that befell the main reporter character in *To Die For*. Either way, birds often have limited agency, which is not a desirable trait to model—in journalists or anyone else. And it goes without saying that reducing a journalist to one of the lowest life forms—scum—or to an inherently evil being—the devil—is destructive to journalism’s mission.

Conversely, the same films also juxtapose these subhuman metaphors with superhuman ones. In *To Die For*, the same TV reporter referenced as a harmless bird is

jokingly connected with Mary Poppins, and in *True Crime*, the same newspaper reporter called a scumbag, the devil, and a sack of shit is mockingly called Mother Teresa and linked with Santa Claus. Most everyone would be flattered to be compared to Mary Poppins, Mother Teresa, or Santa Claus, beloved cultural icons. Such endearing comparisons might come from a place of earnest respect and admiration, and if they inspire someone to want to emulate a successful journalist, then the metaphors could be considered symbiotic to journalism. However, as mentioned earlier, such prestige can also set a journalist up for failure if too high of expectations are placed on her, a destructive attribute of the metaphors. But many journalists are thick-skinned, so they should be able to handle any criticisms that might be directed toward them because of overestimated allusions.

Stereotypes of journalists

The 12 selected films suggested several stereotypes about journalists. Some of the stereotypes were complimentary to the profession of journalism, though most were detrimental. The stereotypes were propagated by multiple films, which indicates a shared attitude toward the journalism profession during the 1990s, at least among Hollywood filmmakers. Although these stereotypes were common throughout multiple films, most journalists would likely agree that not all of them were accurate representations of everyday journalists. Instead, many of the suggested stereotypes were exaggerated caricatures.

Gender stereotypes

As more women continued entering the journalism field in the 1990s, the traditional male dominance of the profession was increasingly challenged and eroded.

This resulted in an internal conflict within journalism between men and women. As suggested by the films, many men in the profession sought to maintain the status quo, and women were expected to prove their masculinity in order to gain respect within the field.

Four of the 12 selected films featured main journalist characters who were women—*Hero*, *I Love Trouble*, *To Die For*, and *Up Close and Personal*. In *Hero*, TV reporter Gale Gayley is sometimes referred to as “Babe” by the station’s news director, Deke. This perhaps could be seen as an homage to Jean Arthur’s reporter character, Louise “Babe” Bennett, in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936). Although the term undoubtedly has misogynistic overtones in that it sexualizes the woman assigned that moniker. Even the Gale Gayley name itself could be considered a phonetical hypocorism, as a diminutive form of the given name “Gale” understandably might be “Galey,” pronounced the same as her surname, “Gayley.” This is similar to women named “Lucille” with the pet name of “Lucy.” Diminutives often express the smallness—and thus potentially the powerlessness—of the person, which is why such names are often given to children, many of whom revert back to their full given name once they reach adulthood. Most often Deke referred to Gale Gayley simply as Gale, though in at least one scene he calls her either “Galey” or “Gayley,” but it is not entirely clear whether he is referring to her in a diminutive format or by her last name.

On multiple occasions in *Hero*, Gayley is mentioned as being less than or not fully human. She says that she wished she had at least considered trying to save a suicidal man atop a skyscraper in order to “feel like a human being.” Later Deke tells a co-worker that Gayley is “pretending to be a person, but she’s really just a reporter.” It seems like from these statements that in order for Gayley to make it as a TV reporter, she

must not only give up what it means for her to be a woman, but also a human altogether. As with the “Babe” and “Galey” remarks—as well as Deke’s calling Gayley a “creampuff” and “marshmallow”—Gayley’s humanity, and thus womanhood, is diminished or even negated by the “less than human” metaphors.

The conflict between men and women within journalism in the 1990s is further highlighted in *I Love Trouble*. The tête-à-têtes between newspaper reporters Sabrina Peterson and Peter Brackett reveal gendered and ageist language. Peterson is an up-and-coming female reporter, whereas Brackett is a veteran male reporter. Brackett not only might be threatened by women entering the newspaper business, but also he might feel intimidated by younger professionals who potentially could elbow him out of a job.

Brackett mocks Peterson’s résumé with a joke about her covering a hypothetical “Pillsbury Bake-Off contest.” This recalls long-held presumptions about the role of women in journalism. In the past for many women who wanted to be reporters, the main jobs offered to them often involved topics that were considered “women’s work,” such as covering fashion shows, society news (including celebrity gossip, as well as births, anniversaries, and related familial news), and children’s issues. The “important” news, such as politics, crime, and international news, often was reserved for male reporters. A slight about a “Pillsbury Bake-Off contest” suggests Brackett thinks Peterson should focus on “women’s news,” which would include baking, cooking, and other kitchen tasks.

Later in *I Love Trouble*, Brackett seems to grow to respect Peterson as a reporter. He even catches and corrects a remark to her when he at first calls her a “girl” and then

clarifies with “woman.” Although Brackett had been resistant to working with Peterson at the beginning, he realizes the skills she possesses and evolves in his notions about her.

Up Close and Personal features another up-and-coming reporter, Sally “Tally” Atwater. She is in the TV news field and is mentored by veteran newsman Warren Justice. Similar to *I Love Trouble*, Atwater and Justice have their ups and downs but ultimately learn to respect and care for each other.

One of Atwater’s early gigs on TV is as a “weather girl,” a term that serves to lessen the forecaster’s womanhood and instead casts her as a Vanna White-esque prop in a role so simple a child could perform it. As a “weather girl,” Atwater wears costumes that reinforce that day’s weather forecast. On sunny, warm days, for example, she sports sunglasses and beachwear. The emphasis on Atwater’s appearance as a “weather girl” seems to indicate viewers are attracted to her sex appeal and not necessarily her forecasting capabilities or journalistic prowess. Thus, Atwater’s value to the TV station is measured by her good looks and not her wisdom, hard work, or other traits that a male journalist would likely be commended for.

Later in the film as Atwater’s experience and TV reporting skills grow, a co-worker tells her that her voice is “full of money.” Again, her value is seen in a relatively superficial trait. Instead of her brains, intuition, or determination garnering praise, her smooth and sweet voice is determined to be pleasing, as well as lucrative.

Atwater is praised for her appearance and voice, traditionally considered feminine attributes. However, she later in the film is criticized for not being “tough enough.” Justice informs her that had he invented her, he would have invented someone “a hell of a lot tougher.” Atwater is expected by her co-workers to exhibit both feminine and

masculine traits—the sexy looks and voice of a woman, but the toughness and strength of a man. To earn Justice’s respect, it seems Atwater has to prove she has the toughness to make it in a man’s world.

The character of Suzanne Stone-Maretto in *To Die For* also seeks to rise through the ranks of TV journalism. One of her first jobs in the business also is as a “weather girl.” But whereas Atwater used that job as a stepping stone to more prestigious assignments, Stone-Maretto’s blind ambition ultimately results in her husband’s death, as well as her own.

Stone-Maretto eschews traditional female responsibilities, such as childbearing and marital fidelity, and instead orchestrates her husband’s murder by manipulating impressionable youths. She is willing to do nearly anything to reach her career goals. A focus on career over family is often associated with men, and the women’s realm often is viewed as the house and children. It seems that in *To Die For*, Stone-Maretto is punished for adopting traditional male characteristics of a career-driven life, as she is murdered and discarded beneath a frozen lake in retaliation for organizing her husband’s murder.

Interestingly, none of the 12 selected films were directed by a woman. Six of the 12 films—*Hero*, *I Love Trouble*, *To Die For*, *Up Close and Personal*, *Wag the Dog*, and *The Insider*—were co-written by women or were based off stories written by women. Seven of the 12 films—*Hero*, *I Love Trouble*, *Natural Born Killers*, *To Die For*, *Mad City*, *Tomorrow Never Dies*, and *True Crime*—were either solely produced or co-produced by women. The authorship of a film can influence the stereotypical messages imbedded within the movie. The four films that featured a primary journalist character who was a woman were all either co-written by women or were based on stories

originally written by women. The four films included both positive and negative portrayals of women. The studio system could set the overall tone of the films and account for the consistent misogyny that appeared throughout some of the movies, as well as the hypermasculine metaphors associated with sports and warfare, two fields traditionally dominated by men. General audiences might have come away from these films with the belief that to enter the journalism field, women had to prove their strength and toughness, and that women's appearances were more valued than their skill sets or knowledge.

Fabricators of news and selfish opportunists

Beyond the specific stereotypes suggested by the metaphors, such as heartless sensationalists or crusading do-gooders, the metaphors and films generally depicted journalists as either fabricators of news and selfish opportunists on one end of the spectrum or whistleblowers and selfless truth-seekers on the other. Metaphors are a linguistic shorthand that draws from humans' shared experiences. The creators of the messages within the films seem to depict journalists overall as either concerned with their own well-being and success or concerned with others' well-being and success.

Negative portrayals of journalists or strategic communicators as fabricators of news and selfish opportunists appeared primarily in *Natural Born Killers*, *To Die For*, *Mad City*, *Tomorrow Never Dies*, and *Wag the Dog*, and to a lesser extent in *Hero*. The tabloid TV journalist in *Natural Born Killers* makes a living by sensationalizing gory and scandalous crimes, and he goes so far as to participate in violent crimes himself. The seemingly doe-eyed TV reporter in *To Die For* is actually a ruthless femme fatale who does not let even murder stop her from pursuing her career in television journalism. The

seasoned TV reporter in *Mad City* takes advantage of a hostage situation in order to further his own career. The global media baron in *Tomorrow Never Dies* instigates wars in order to cause unrest and position his company as the worldwide leader in mass media. The strategic communicators in *Wag the Dog* promote a fictionalized war as a true event to deflect attention away from a brewing presidential scandal. *Hero* is more ambiguous in that it shows TV journalists sensationalizing a suicide and a plane crash, but the reporters still hunt for the truth, regardless of how they present the information to audiences.

Although these might seem like extreme examples of journalism gone awry, it is not difficult to think of real-world instances of journalists who have plagiarized, invented stories, or partaken in shameless self-promotion on the heels of a disaster. Viewers of these films that present a negative image of journalists might have come away from the theater with the idea most journalists act in similar ways. But that of course is far from the truth. Most journalists simply do their jobs to the best of their abilities. Whereas most journalists likely would be ashamed of the depiction of the profession in these films, other movies from the decade present a more positive picture of journalists.

Whistleblowers and selfless truth-seekers

I Love Trouble, *The Pelican Brief*, *The Paper*, *Up Close and Personal*, *The Insider*, and *True Crime* overall offer a complimentary view of those in the journalism profession. Although many of the metaphors within all the films were often derogatory toward journalists, these six films ended with journalists who successfully exposed an important truth or who experienced personal and professional growth.

The duo of newspaper reporters in *I Love Trouble* sets aside their differences to reveal the reason a train crashed. The investigative journalist in *The Pelican Brief* helps protect a law student who is in danger and helps expose wrongdoings by “big oil” and certain members of the federal government. The main newspaper reporter in *The Paper* sacrifices sleep and time with his pregnant wife in order to set the record straight about two teenage boys who were falsely accused of murder. A veteran TV journalist and a newcomer to the profession help each other thrive personally and professionally in *Up Close and Personal*. In *The Insider*, a *60 Minutes* producer is willing to put his career on the line in order to persuade a former tobacco company executive to tell the truth about questionable practices in the tobacco industry. A longtime newspaper reporter in *True Crime* struggles with personal demons and addictions but helps ensure an innocent man is removed from death row. As mentioned earlier, *Hero* straddles the line between a positive and negative portrayal of journalists. The journalists in *Hero* are indeed dogged in their pursuit of the truth, though it is not always clear whether their intentions are pure. At times, the TV journalists in *Hero* seem more concerned with ratings than with exposing the truth for the sake of the truth.

Most journalists could undoubtedly rally around these positive portrayals of the profession. The journalists depicted in these films forgo their own safety and comfort in order to assist members of the community who are often overlooked or neglected. All in all, these are shining examples of reporters that should make journalists proud. Moviegoers, too, likely would have been encouraged by these journalist characters, who despite personal struggles still succeeded in finding the truth and helping fellow human beings.

Summary

Journalists who watch these films might dismiss the exaggerated language and plots as entertainment. Of course, films need conflict among characters in order to advance the storyline and entice viewers. However, those moviegoers unfamiliar with the journalism field might come away from these movies with many inaccurate assumptions about journalism and journalists as a whole.

Most of the negative imagery about journalists originating from the metaphors in the films came from statements by the journalists themselves or their co-workers. The films indicate the journalism profession is harsh to itself, its biggest critics are within, and journalists are guilty of perpetuating negative stereotypes about themselves. Perhaps journalists view this simply as self-deprecating humor or a healthy dose of humility. But journalists likely cannot expect any given members of the public to change their stereotypical outlook about the profession when those very people witness journalists mocking themselves in mass media messages. Many journalists parlay their writing skills to the big screen, and in this instance, the change might have to originate from within. That is, journalists who want to change the narrative when it comes to stereotypical representations of those in the journalism field might need to help create and alter the messages that are transmitted in movies and TV shows. When everyday people begin to see journalists in a positive light—as opposed to exploitative and cold-hearted sensationalists—only then might their perceptions about the journalism field change.

Many major media outlets today focus on “catching” a rival media group in a snafu or scandal, highlighting the mistakes, misjudgments, and flaws in the field. And

yet some of the same media outlets seem puzzled that many in the general public view those in the journalism field so skeptically. Instead of a constant game of “gotcha”—which ultimately has no winners, only losers—perhaps media outlets would do well to remember the quote often attributed to the Rev. Jesse Jackson, “Never look down on anybody unless you’re helping him up.” By working together, learning from one another, and giving praise when it is due, media outlets can start to change stereotypical perceptions about journalists and the journalism field.

It can be easy for those in the journalism profession to dismiss films—such as comedies, romantic comedies, dramas, or action movies—that portray journalists in a less-than-stellar light for laughs or tension. However, it is important to remember that real-world journalists are not superheroes. Journalists are humans, who are not infallible, who sometimes let emotions or hormones take over, and who sometimes make wrong decisions. The metaphors in journalism-related films from the 1990s undoubtedly could be lopsided with their portrayals of journalists as heartless sensationalists, but it would be lopsided, too, had the films’ metaphors only glorified journalists as saintly truth-seekers immune from mortals’ missteps.

Perhaps it is ideal if Hollywood neither demonizes nor lionizes journalists—or members of any other profession, for that matter. After all, journalists are only human. Showing them as soulless and careless is not indicative of the entire profession, and putting them on pedestals only offers a high precipice from which to fall from grace. Some journalists might do bad things, yes, but they are not inherently wicked people. Journalists also are not wholeheartedly, 100 percent free from human error. A subtle,

more well-rounded approach in capturing journalists on film could serve future moviemakers—and those in the journalism profession—well.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Examining other decades

The 1990s is considered by many a relatively stable decade of economic success and peace for the United States. That would soon change with the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the horizon, bloody wars in the Middle East that lasted for years, and the financial downturn of the so-called Great Recession. The journalism-related films in post-9/11 America often mark the stark change in portrayals of reporters from feckless busybodies to crusading truth-tellers. For example, *State of Play* from 2009 and *Spotlight* from 2015 are more reminiscent of 1970s post-Watergate films, such as *All the President's Men* from 1976.

A few decades removed from the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, the 1990s was an oasis of relative stability in the U.S., compared with preceding decades and the decades yet to come. However, tropes from 1990s journalism films appeared in films from earlier decades and continue to be carried on today. A visual metaphor at the beginning of *Mad City* links the assembly of video camera equipment with the assembly of a firearm before an assassination. In Alfred Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent* from 1940, an assassin posing as a photographer conceals his pistol beside the camera he is holding. And in *Nightcrawler* from 2014, a stringer cameraman stealthily inspects a home where homicides have just occurred, as though he is a member of law enforcement clearing the scene with his weapon (camera) drawn. Some metaphors and references—such as cameras' being akin to firearms, both of which can “shoot”—have been used for years before the 1990s and likely will be used for many years in the future.

More research into the topic of metaphors in journalism-related movies could be conducted for decades before the 1990s and decades after the 1990s. Research only within the period of the 1990s could also be considered too narrow, but because there do not seem to be any comparable studies, a study covering the films of one decade seems more manageable. Once more analyses are compiled, a larger picture could be ascertained regarding how similar or dissimilar metaphor usage is among many decades of journalism movies.

It is important to note that movies do not exist in an ephemeral vacuum consisting solely of the year or decade in which they were made. Especially with the advancements of DVDs, Blu-rays, and online libraries, movies from the 1990s and earlier continue to be watched by contemporary viewers. Some of the metaphors from the selected films might have been symbiotic to journalism's cause at the time the films were released in the 1990s. By 1990s standards, vulgar references to gangbangs or rape might have shown the journalists as deeply committed to their profession, so much so that they used such serious language to frame their arguments. However, in the post-Me Too society of the late 2010s, such metaphors might be viewed as insensitive and politically incorrect, and overall a destructive view of journalism. Considering nearly no field has been immune from sexual assault accusations and scandals in recent years—including the movie industry and journalism—references to rape and orgies could be seen by filmgoers as “salt in the wound” or cruel inside jokes amongst predatory directors, writers, and other executives in the film and journalism professions. Interpretations of metaphors in films can be fluid, depending on the time period and society in which the interpretation takes place.

The need for quantitative research

Quantitative research also could provide added layers of context to the study of metaphors in journalism films. Such research might reveal the proportion of “negative” metaphors about journalism to “positive” ones in any given movie. That could then indicate how many journalism films from a particular decade were overall symbiotic to journalism’s cause and how many were overall destructive.

Such research also could shed light on whether the number of metaphors about journalists or journalism in a film indicates how likely that film is to be sympathetic or antagonistic to the journalism field. In the qualitative research of metaphors in 1990s journalism movies, it was clear that two of films with the highest box office earnings—*The Pelican Brief* and *Tomorrow Never Dies*—had fewer metaphors than most of the other movies. Is there a relationship between the number of metaphors in a film and that film’s ticket sales? Were these two films more successful financially because they contained fewer metaphors, relative to most of the other analyzed movies? If so, that could indicate the average moviegoer prefers films with dialogue that is not as figurative, compared with other movies.

Additionally, quantitative research could examine the number of metaphors in journalism films throughout history to determine if metaphors are becoming more prevalent. As more metaphors are created, it seems logical that more might enter into film dialogue in future films. However, as stated previously, the effectiveness of metaphors often depends on their uniqueness and originality, so quantity does not necessarily trump quality. In fact, the more a metaphor is repeatedly used in language,

the more likely it is to lose the imagery and contextual layers of meaning that once accompanied it.

Limitations of metaphor analyses

Metaphor analyses can provide useful information when examining any range of subjects. However, the method also has its drawbacks. When coding the metaphors, some of the metaphors could have fallen into more than one category, and others did not neatly fall into any particular category.

For example, in *Up Close and Personal*, veteran TV news director Justice quips, “It’s a runaway train,” in reference to two journalists bickering about a story while the camera is rolling. The metaphor could be considered part of the violent metaphors relating to warfare, as runaway trains are similar to torpedoes, racing along until crashing into an object and exploding, causing damage to property and people. The metaphor also could be linked with the commodity metaphors, as many trains transport goods across the country. Or the runaway train metaphor could be categorized as a superhuman metaphor because Superman was often lauded as “faster than a speeding bullet” and “more powerful than a locomotive.”

Because language is so complex and one word or phrase can have many different meanings, it can be difficult to pinpoint the most likely inference. And as previously mentioned, the meanings of language can change throughout time. A study of the metaphors in the same selected films might generate vastly different interpretations if done 10 years before or 10 years after this study because language is constantly evolving.

Also, researching strictly the metaphors within movies does not include analyzing other valuable information in films. Many stereotypes are portrayed in films that do not necessarily come in the form of metaphors.

Metaphors in other professions

Further research about metaphors in films could yield a list of common metaphor categories that are transferable among various occupations. For example, it is plausible that the five primary metaphor categories that emerged in this study might not be unique to the field of journalism. Films about bankers, law enforcement officers, or politicians, for instance, might employ the same metaphorical comparisons involving sports, violent warfare, the human senses, commodities and entertainment, and subhumans and superhumans.

Beyond films, metaphors could be examined in fictional literature, television shows, music lyrics, and other media to ascertain whether common themes and categories exist among multiple art forms. Are journalists portrayed using similar metaphors in TV series and novels?

As metaphor analyses can be conducted on anything that includes metaphors, such analyses also can be performed on nonfiction works, including newspaper articles, magazine articles, television news scripts, and public relations materials. This could provide additional context about how journalists use metaphors within their own work. Partnered with analyses about how journalists are portrayed in fictional works, the nonfiction analyses could offer a larger image of both how metaphors are used to describe journalists and how journalists use metaphors to describe.

Bibliography

- Benoit, W. L. (2001). Framing through temporal metaphor: The “bridges” of Bob Dole and Bill Clinton in their 1996 acceptance addresses. *Communication Studies*, 52(1), 70-84.
- Box Office Mojo. Franchise index. Retrieved from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/franchises/?view=Franchise&sort=sumgross&order=DESC&p=.htm>
- Braddock, C. (1992). The value and power of metaphors for future professional writers. *Journalism Educator*, 47(1), 80-84.
- Brennen, B. S. (2004). From headline shooter to picture snatcher. *Journalism*, 5(4), 423-439.
- Coleman, C., & Ritchie, L. D. (2011). Examining metaphors in biopolitical discourse. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Online. Retrieved from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p518926_index.html
- Ditman, L. A. (1993). Negotiating the women of broadcast news. *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, 15, 3-14.
- Dixon, T. L. (2000). A social cognitive approach to studying racial stereotyping in the mass media. *African American Research Perspectives*, 6(1), 60-68.
- Ehrlich, M. C. (1997). Journalism in the movies. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 14(3), 267-281.
- Ehrlich, M. C. (2006). *Journalism in the movies*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

- Fiske, S. T. (1993). Controlling other people: The impact of power on stereotyping. *American Psychologist*, 48(6), 621-628.
- Hudlin, E. W. (1979). Film language. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 13(2), 47-56.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2005). *The production of reality*. J. O'Brien, (Ed.). Newbury Park, Calif.: Pine Forge Press.
- Lasorsa, D., & Dai, J. (2007). When news reporters deceive: The production of stereotypes. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 84(2), 281-298.
- Len-Rios, M. E., Rodgers, S., Thorson, E., & Yoon, D. (2005). Representation of women in news and photos: Comparing content to perceptions. *Journal of Communication*, 55(1), 152-168.
- Padilla, A. M., & Perez, W. (2003). Acculturation, social identity, and social cognition: A new perspective. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 25(1), 35-55.
- Pease Chock, P. (1987). The irony of stereotypes: Toward an anthropology of ethnicity. *Cultural Anthropology*, 2(3), 347-368.
- Pryluck, C. (1975). The film metaphor metaphor: The use of language-based models in film studies. *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 3(2), 117-123.
- Sopory, P., & Dillard, J. P. (2002). The persuasive effects of metaphor: A meta-analysis. *Human Communication Research*, 28(3), 382-419.
- Weeks, L. (2009). Chronicling the death of American newspapers. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101237069>
- Why do the French call the British 'the roast beefs'? (2003). From BBC News online. Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/2913151.stm

Zynda, T. H. (1979). The Hollywood version: Movie portrayals of the press. *Journalism History*, 6(1), 16-25.